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V I S H N U

or

The Planet of the
Sevenfold Unity

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An autobiographical scientific and mystical Romance

by

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B. WESTERN

Composed 1890/91

M o t t o

„Set your affections on things above and not on things of the earth, for where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.“

„He that hateth not his father and mother is not worthy of me.“
(Sayings ascribed to Crist.)

„However we brazen it out we men are a little race.“

Lord Tennyson

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

This earth of ours is a dualism. Its night and day, its sun and moon, its light and dark, its male and female, our bodies with their bilateral symmetry, our passions of love and hate, our parties of conservative and destructive intellects, our synthesis and analysis, our conception of soul and matter as opposite elements, our magnetism with its positive and negative poles, the never ending process of dissolution and reintegration of life and death, all these facts and conceptions are at once proof and consequences of the one and supreme fact stated above, that this earth is a dualism. We have come round to the statement of this fact once more, just as the moon swings round from new to full and from full to new again.

Indeed in our dual state of being we are capable of little else but arguing in a circle, blowing hot and cold and expatiating on the important law of identity the basis of all our reasoning, our one self-evident proposition that $A=A$.

But we have the sun and moon to keep us going and that is something. And a pretty little parody of their apparently dual and complementary existence is the duplicate sexual state of being of animated nature with its crowning ganglion humanity and his three volume novels!

And let human pride note for its edification that this sexual dualism is after all but the function of an illusion for sun and moon only appear as a correlated dualism, ruling the day and night respectively to this ant-hill earth of ours. In reality they are only pulsating atoms in the glowing body of the heavens themselves to us also only an apparition and inconceivable in their real essence. All we can say is that in heaven they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Let us then abandon

for the present this attempt to scale the celestial heights—perhaps after all only an instinctive longing inherited from our ape-like progenitors—who when a glacial epoch or some other natural catastrophe had destroyed their forests and compelled them to wobble about uncomfortably on their hind legs over bog and moor—for much woodland athletics had long before this turned front legs and paws into hands and arms—doubtless often cast many a yearning glance heavenward where their tree tops ought to have been and thought regretfully of the jolly times of palms and mangroves and this very yearning for the past, for the lower state though in a material sense higher of existence, the old arborescent mode of life was thus perhaps one of the most powerful agencies in the creation of a skyward looking animal who—as Ovid and after him one of the early Christian Fathers remarks—shows his divine origin by being the only animal which looks boldly up to heaven, while all the rest of the higher animals keep their eyes fixed upon the ground. Thus that “yearning for something afar from the sphere of our sorrow” which the poet so beautifully speaks of, is in all likelihood but the primitive man-ape’s regretful longing for his lost Eden—in the tree-tops which has gradually expanded into a mighty longing to penetrate the mysteries of the huge banyan tree of the sky—that mighty tangle of star-leaves and force-whirlwinds, that vast forest of the Material in which we live and move and have our being. It did good work, doubtless in its primitive form, this arborescent longing of conservative apedom, it was its spiritual drill sergeant teaching the men-apes to hold their heads up, and probably helped them to shed those caudal appendages which were so useful in the tree-tops and so extremely inconvenient trailing about on the miry ground like a lady’s petticoat. For I do not subscribe to the Darwinian theory that our ancestor’s tails were rubbed off by assiduous attendance at antediluvian board schools and by fidgetting on hard benches over the intractability of their multiplication sums and algebraic

equations. No, this may have been a secondary, accelerating cause by increasing the local inflammation, the primary one was, we may feel pretty sure, the gradually acquired upright attitude of primitive humanity—or shall I say Hanumanity? which caused a congestion of the blood in those voluminous prolongations of the caudal vertebræ—vulgarly called tails which as they became diseased little by little dropped off. Whether however in-breeding may not have had something to do with it I leave to the consideration of biologists more learned than myself. The absence of tails in Manx Cats may perhaps find its explanation in the union of near relations during many generations—a state of things necessitated by the fact of these cats living on a small island. I am myself acquainted with a large colony of stable-cats who have not many opportunities of crossing with the outer world of cats and among these it is no uncommon thing for a kitten to be born without the vestige of a tail and never to develop one in adult life. But if this fact could be established what an interesting inference we should be able to draw from it this viz:—that primitive man was in all probability developed out of the ape on a desert island, for neither a valley surrounded by mountains nor a plain surrounded by forests would have sufficed to fence him in. And when we look round to see what island would be specially adapted for the purpose, how can we fail to recognise the claims of the Emerald Isle where to this very day the interesting aborigines are so remarkably simian in habits, modes of thought and physiognomy. However this may be I think from these reflections we may deduce the moral that it is an unwise thing to break too completely with the past. For just as the yearning of the man-ape for his primitive arboreal homes carried in it the germs of a higher life which through it alone could find an adequate development, so it may be our lot only to attain a still higher development by clinging to those arboreal forms of thought and those past institutions which contrast so strongly with the

rough plains and barren islands of our modern life and its circumscribed but busy world of ideas.

I said, let us abandon for the present the attempt to scale the celestial heights and lo! I have carried out the maxim to the full and have been busily grubbing among mush-room spawn for the last page or two and yet I never meant to circumscribe myself to the surface of the earth's sphere: without attempting to scale the celestial heights one may be permitted to take a look now and then at the moon and even to cast a timid glance or two at her collaborateur the sun. There they are up in the sky: the ancient ever-young father and mother: Savitri or more familiarly vitri i. e. pater or vater working away in the sky to supply his household with life-stuff, food, clothing, etc., in the shape of light and heat, and his worthy consort Meta, the measurer, busy Martha troubled about many things, good excellent sky-mother that she is arranging, distributing, ordering everything, spinning the flax, watering the garden, sewing the seeds and paying particular attention, like a worthy midwife to the breeding of a healthy stock of monkeys and human beings. And as it is in the apparition of the heavens so it is on earth. The father goes out into the field or woodland and brings home provender, game, grain, flax, for spinning and live animals to tame and the good house-mother stores them, cooks, spins, weaves and pays attention to the breeding and taming of the domestic animals which are but the function of an apparition! And so we come round again to where we first began. Ever round and round as we illustrate the great central truth that this earth is a dualism. And yet again only the semblance of a dualism seeming so to our dualistic selves. And yet again our dualistic selves are the product of the great law of terrestrial dualism. For while the sun and moon seen from the earth give the queue to our mimic dualism setting us jiggling in couples like atoms of hydrogen—evolving us out of split and quartered peas painting us black and white, like the night and day or the black and white

God of primitive Slav and Finn dwellers round the pole—a Janus god who was perhaps after all but the reflection of the Polar winter night and the Polar summer day or else a reminiscence of successive pendulum like migrations of the primitive race from the pole to the equator and again from the equator to the pole during alternating æons of glaciation and estivation—the earth and moon considered as a system by themselves constitute an actual dualism and this singular coincidence and harmony between the apparition of the heavens, the actual constitution of the sun and moon system and the whole texture of our thought and its basis, our physical form of being wrought by cell-halvings and quarterings, ad infinitum into bilateral symmetries of mathematical precision can hardly one would think be accidental. To our thought, our modes of thought, have continually intensified the idea of dualism seen in the apparition of the heavens, the external dualism apparent and real have again intensified our bodily dualism and with it our dualistic modes of thought playing into one another's hands so to say for ages until at last anything but dualistic forms of life and indeed dualistic being of any sort have come to be absolutely unthinkable and to our ideas the equivalent of mere nothingness. Is it possible, however, to find any real basis for this singularly mystical concatenation of coincidences apparent and real—the apparent ones being as remarkable as the so called real ones—in the actual constitution of the earth and its moon? or at any rate to offer any plausible conjecture for so strange a state of things?

The following suggestions are given for what they are worth. Seeing that we find the planets outside our orbit sometimes to possess several moons while those within possess none at all, our one-moonedness may be due to the same cause, either our particular distance from the sun, our relative size or rate of cooling consequent upon our planetary size or some other cause or combination of causes, as that to which is due the primary evolution

of life in cells so constituted as to multiply by simple division into two halves. There may well be a higher unity in nature than is at present suspected even by the world of science; a formal cause based on the laws of geometry, which when discovered and demonstrated, the narrow fools of efficient and material causes will howl at with the same fanatic virulence as the religious noodles of the past glued to their telescope of final causes howled at the demonstrators of material and efficient causes. Thus cycles and æons and periods whirl on and on, driving suns and stars, moons and planets round in eternal gyrations, till after millions of ages the word goes forth stand at ease and as you were and everything is as it was and as it will be billions of Kalpa's hence. And as with the universe, so in an infinitely small way with matter-spawn with the earth-ape and the earth-ape's thought is it, his thoughts spin round and round the sun of truth and a time comes at last in his fatalistic and predestined trains of reasoning and experiment (I refer to humanity as an organised whole) when all things come again and are as they were.

And yet this very dualism even in the earlier ages of the world developed into the idea of trinity which being transcendental was regarded as a religious mystery of supreme importance. And yet constituted as we are—the functions of a mere appearance—the development of this idea was inevitable. There was the dualism found everywhere of which night and day, the sun and moon, were ever-living types and that everything or something in which the dualism cohered. In the most primitive legends of the great Aryan brotherhood—legends, possibly the common property of primitive Aryan and Finnish peoples dwelling within the arctic circle and about the North-Pole, this trinity seems to have been thought of as Matter in Chaotic darkness, the moon, and the sun typified in the primitive legends by three castles, one of lead, one of silver and one of gold. But the primitive God was a reflection of terrestrial and human dualism Svart og hvid

the black and white God a beautiful youth ever young and winning to whom even down to the end of last century under the form of Roman Catholicism a cock and first fruits were offered in Autumn on the very spot (now occupied by a Catholic Cathedral) on which his stone image once stood. And here these preliminary reflections may terminate. What follows, call it a vision or story, is more or less a narrative of actual events.

CHAPTER II

PRELIMINARY

According to the theory of my earlier childhood, a theory I believe held generally by Anglo-Aryan children—babies are dropped from the sky. In order to break the fall, a large four poster bed has to be prepared in which the expectant mother is laid—the infant then falls like the dew about eventide, condensed out of heaven or ciel on the ciel or ceiling of the four poster bed, an angel then carefully flies down with it, lays it by the side of the sleeping mother and the child is born.

Such an event had happened in our family and after a few days I had the delicious privilege of entertaining the diminutive new comer in my own crib. This crib was an oblong structure about the length and breadth of a child's grave with strong walls of stamped or perforated iron painted a bright fawn color. The perforations were good sized triangular or circularshaped gaps—the apex of the fans pointed downwards the concave sides of this apex being formed of two halves of the semicircular edges of two similar fans in the next subjacent row of perforations. Or you might compare the system to parallel rows of parachutes, each parachute in the upper row springing exactly from the middle of the balloon-like expansion of the one below it. It was thus an apt foreshadowing of the narrow crib of social etiquette with its hard metallic walls of chilling conventionality.—That grave of all life

and poetry into which we are born to perish as pitilessly as the smoke and sparks fly upwards. Often and often during days of sickness my tired eyes ranged from row to row the impalpable fish-scales of the crib-walls or I ran my fingers from fanshaped void to void, till the sharp edges of the stamped iron galled them and I desisted. How like the hateful prison walls of Christianity and superstition which only let the light of nature through in rows of glaring blotches, so that the heaven's blessed sun-light which was intended to bathe and refresh the soul, is so manipulated by society's surpliced turnkeys and hangmen as to torture and bewilder both, soul, mind and senses! But now all this was forgotten. It was not so very long since I had myself emerged from the wonderland of extremely early childhood, from the forest of the meadow and that strange suffused light of being and sunlight mixed which pervades one's first years on earth like the amber which encloses flies and moths or the still and equable splendour of the midnight-sun. Religion and its execrable minions had not yet loomed in my imagination to blemish the visions of delight nature is so lavish of to all and church and chapel so eager to dispel or dole out in dribblets after being passed through their own unsavoury sieves. The little brother came therefore as a reminiscence of my own early state and when the dear little creature pressed its soft body against mine, the sense and desire of earthly dualism stirred strong in me and I thought in a vague half conscious way how we two would go out into that great mysterious world to which I knew we were destined together, together share its pleasures and its pains, two against a multitude confront, its raging human fiends of fanaticism and party hate, be true children of earth's sorrow sphere, united and united die together. Or am I dreaming and are these but the vain regrets of a later and bitterer period when I thought how light its hardships had been if shared with him and am I now only projecting these vain regrets further backward into the past. I know not. At

any rate my visions of dualistic, earthly happiness were not destined to be realized, but melted away like the frail life upon which they were founded. For a cloud gathered over the life that had scarcely begun to dawn. My little brother was withdrawn from me and the cloud which had gathered round his single life seemed now to extend itself over the whole household and to cast a shadow there. They were gloomy days that followed and they brought with them what in those days I looked upon as a plague of frogs ominous of the death of the sons of Israel. For through the mists and gloom emerged gigs and chaises and from the gigs and chaises descended gentlemen in spick and span frock coats, learned professors of surgical and medical renown who stepped jauntily up to the sick room and came slowly down from it shaking their heads and were then closeted together in consultation. And at last a day came when with aching hearts we waited together in the drawing room silent through the consciousness of a common sorrow and a common dread, and strained our senses to perceive the sound of wheels and the pulling of the rusty bell handle at the front door. At last they came, the crunching of the wheels on the crisp gravel before the front door and the tinkle of the bell which rang near the pantry at the back of the house, indicated their arrival. Then the drawing room door opened and the worthy clod pole who officiated as a footman announced the family doctor and a noted surgeon who entered followed by his servant who carried a case of surgical instruments. This he deposited on the piano and then disappeared. Very few words were exchanged between my parents and the professional gentlemen. The situation was too grave. After a few minutes the surgeon removed his case of instruments from the piano and all four filed slowly out of the room and went slowly up the low staircase which wound round an ellipse to the first floor under an elliptical ceiling lighted by a sash-window in the wall circular above instead of square and warmed by a large

iron stove, the cylindrical iron chimney of which made a bend and was then let out of the afore mentioned window from the side of the stove which itself stood opposite the drawing room door—exactly in the center of the ellipse. It was as parents and doctors filed out of the room and trailed solemnly upstairs that the strange event occurred which forms the starting point of my narrative if so this composition can be called. I was standing by the third most westward of our drawing room windows (the house looked south) and not far from the door leading to the staircase, this window being in fact just opposite it. I stood there looking vaguely into the warm blue of the sunny spring sky when a peculiar effect seemed to overspread it—probably the result of some change in my brain and I distinctly saw the night heaven and the stars. But what fixed and rivetted my attention was a large orb like the moon's, but it was not the moon for round it were revolving seven moons, some full and others half moons. I cannot say at this distance of time positively whether I actually saw seven moons or whether learning as I grew older of Jupiter and his seven satellites I imagined that what I saw was Jupiter and the moons around him. At any rate I saw several and they were some of them half moons or gibbous. An impression also haunts my mind that on this particular occasion when I looked out into the warm spring sky at this solemn crisis my imagination and memory merely reproduced a vivid picture of what I had seen in reality at a much earlier period of infant life. But of one thing I am certain that my remembrance of that phenomenon is as clear as my recollection of the great comet of 1858 a few years later and identical in kind with this unequivocal reminiscence of an unmistakable astronomical event. I remained a few minutes looking out of the window and then turned away with the strange picture vividly imprinted on my mind. And all at once there fell upon me a feeling of hopeless misery and despair and I crept away and hid behind the cold and empty stove in the

elliptical staircase and remained I hardly know how long. Doubtless in my highly wrought state of mind the vibrations of the old house caused by the movements and whisperings of the surgeons and operators upstairs told their own sad story to my inner consciousness. In my lair I began to rage against the race of doctors, their professional etiquette, their bowings and smirking and handshakings as it were through the very phantasm of the king of terrors himself. And yet their very punctilliousness was in a manner praiseworthy and not censurable:—It was wrought in them by that sense of responsibility in matters of life and death which was after all only another manifestation of our earthly dualism. And now the dread forboding that possessed me deepened into the certainty of hopeless grief. All the medical consultations had turned upon the question whether a nœvus should be excised or stabbed with a needle; the latter method was adopted and the operation was satisfactorily performed but the poor little brother died a few hours afterwards. There was no need to drag me out of my hiding place to tell it me, I knew already from the vision that his spirit had fled back to the night-heaven. Still more melancholy days followed. Everyone trod softly about the house; and I remember a day when all three of us, father, mother and myself sat with full hearts and heavy streaming eyes hand in hand. It may have been the day of the funeral but I do not think I was taken to the gloomy Christian ceremony—gloomy it must be under any denomination—only the next sunday I was shown a small mound railed in by very spacious iron railings and given to understand that there lay all that remained of my little brother. Later a small marble cross was set up at the head of the grave and we piously took a look at it after evening service and sometimes planted a few violets there. Then these visits became rarer and at last the whole affair was forgotten and relegated to the world of shadow. The accomplished fact—the thing that being once done can never be undone but must

remain for ever and ever an accomplished—fact the one phenomenon of our earthly dualism that pictures to us the possibility of the conception—eternity—how soon is all record of it effaced from our conscious memory and is as though it never had been.

CHAPTER III

MY SME JSNOM OPICI: WE ARE ONLY APES!

One more fragment from these early years and I have done with them. A week or so after the little brother's funeral, I thought I would like again to hide behind the stove in the elliptical staircase to see how it felt. How gloomy it was that rusty iron stove, so dead and lifeless. All the heat evaporated out of it, with its smell of chilled iron, that peculiar smell which boilers give out after being frequently heated and cooled. And on the floor of the seldom swept ellipse was a coating of dust intermingled with a few larger grains and fragments of coal. Als I squatted there behind the stove in the semi-darkness, I stretched my hand out. It encountered something rough and crumpled. I drew the object to the light and found it was a rag-dry and dusty-on which were reddish brown spots that felt hard like crape. Perhaps is was only a rag that had been used for cleaning knives or polishing. But to my imagination at the time it seemed to be a relic of the operation which had ended so fatally, one of the cloths that had been used to staunch the blood and which a careless and indifferent housemaid had doubtless flung behind the stove to be out of the way. I shrunk from the dusty relic with its apparent traces of a quenched and vanished life and from the chill greenish iron of the stove which also told of a vanished life, a life that was wont to crackle and sparkle and glower, till the stove's cylindrical sides grew blood red

with the heat when the snow lay thick upon the fields in winter and the icicles sparkled under the eaves. Now I fled from the elliptical staircase and its lifeless stove as though it had been the labyrinth of a dead world, fled into the late summer evening where the sun was setting blood red through a sea of purple vapour. Though shorn of his rays the sun at all events was full of life and vigour. And yet this very redness of the solar orb, philosophers tell us is not a sign of his vigorous full blooded manhood but a symptom that he has passed his climacteric and is on the way to a slow old age of carbonization and dusty death. So that what is with us the very type and essence of organic vitality—the crimson hue of our electric blood, is with him a premonition of decease. It is the white stars that are in the heyday of a roystering jovial youth, who are sowing their wild oats in a celestial paradise—the russet suns are the port wine colonels and after dinner tipplers the old staggers in fact whose enjoyment is only a revival in memory of past delights which have to be resuscitated by a process of assiduous nipping. But lo! as the red orb sets the white disc of the full moon emerges above the eastern horizon a symbol in its stainless glory of those transcendent celestial vitalities the youthful suns untinged as yet by any stain of blood. Strange that the pale orb of Dian in itself the very embodiment of barrenness, torpidity and death, whose semblance of life is only the mere ghastly reflection of an ebbing, cooling expiring vitality of the suns, should in its utter deathliness through the purity of its borrowed radiance present us with the most perfect image of all that is most fiery and exuberant in celestial existance. Another train of thoughts is suggested by the respectively red and green vividness of the setting sun and the rising moon or perhaps not so much a train of thoughts as a series of dualisms. First there is the dualism of the sun with his ruddy light and the moon with her chlorous tinge, the still vigorous but yet dying sun, and the dead immortalized moon, lying snow

white in her eternal trance and in her death the most perfect image of the glorious radiance and vigour of new born suns, then there is the further coincidence of red and green being complimentary colours, red again being the typical colour of animal life and green of vegetable, these two halves of the great dualism of terrestrial life being themselves complimentary to one another. How strange, too, be it noted parenthetically, that in the animal kingdom death announces himself by turning the red green but in the vegetable by turning the green red.

Then again in our very veins the dualism is still carried out in the red and white discs or corpuscles, reproducing in Miniature countless copies of the red sun and the white moon of our firmament. And yet again another dualism.

For just as the white hot incandescence of infant suns is the starting point of the whole order of visible material existence so iron is the starting point of the whole duplicate series of organic terrestrial existences and their electrical and vital phenomena and just as the organic series is double-vegetable and animal green and red, so iron forms two series of salts the oxides and peroxides themselves respectively green and red. Here we seem to touch hard ground at last and to realize the fact that what we call organic life, like the metallic salts, is nothing more than a phenomenon due to matter cooling so that evolution, though to our intelligence apparently the creation of higher forms out of lower ones, may be in reality only the orderly precipitation or embodying of preexisting types or of a vital substratum in a series of solid and visible forms much as frost evolves over a moist surface of a window pane first points of ice and then very thin striae and finally covers it over with a gorgeous tapestry of elaborate ice fronds and arabesques. These are indeed fugitive but the plan on which they are formed and the substratum of which they are composed are both eternal like an accomplished fact. And then lastly there is the sexual dualism aping the illusive solar and lunar dualism, the female being chlorous in tendency

like the sea, ruled by the moon weak of purpose change-ful and uncertain and doubtless of this character and temper-ament through a tendency to an excess of white corpuscles, while the male sex is normally under the dominion of the sun, the red corpuscles tending to pre-dominate in him and then being under the influence of the magnetic and electric forces of solar light inherent in the heat. And so we have fetched a wider circle in our theorizings, have penetrated a little deeper the mystery of earthly dualism and have got to see why the ancient rishis who composed the Vedas and whose insight into religious mysteries is so much deeper and truer than that of the Jewish fetish worshippers with their stone idol Jalveh culminating in the Christians' Rock of ages, saw in Savitri the light provider and prototype of pitri the father or food provider of the human being's family and in Mata the measurer the careful mother of the family who stored and measured out the provender the pitri or pater had brought home from the woods to sustain his primitive household. Again dualism becomes apparent in regarding solar life and the function of the illusion of it we call our life in point of time when, be it observed, in passing, the implied idea of something triple is also prominent underlying the idea of dualism. For the sun progresses like our day and night or the polar summer and winter typified in the god svatoghvid from day to night, from a glowing white-hot mass to an orb of death and blackness and only when the thin red line which marks the incipient decay of solar vitality has appeared does the function of this function the sanguinary material, animal life of planets situated like our earth, evolve itself through a brief instant of stellar time. A pulse more of vitality in the solar life would scorch a pulse less freeze what we call life into nonexistence. If animate existence occupied a larger space of the solar systems, these latter might be compared to the Talipot-palm which grows some thirty years, flowers once and then dies. But as a matter of fact the thin film of space occupied

by organic being, compared with the universe is so utterly insignificant that the most diminutive parasite fails to give us the smallest conception of its tenuity or of our true place in nature looked upon as an organic whole. The faintest vibration of a thought in the smallest nerve cell of the brain cortex is an eternity of time and space compared with the whole history of organic life on a planet like our own in relation to the abysses of time and space in which that organic series manifests itself.

These reflections have led us some way from the narrative but as I propose to skip some four and twenty years between child-hood and man-hood they will serve in some sort to fill up the gap. We all fare to a certain degree alike. Society takes the new comer by the hand, makes him acquainted with the state of being he has nolens volens being pitchforked into. If society would modestly confine itself to the very necessary task of rendering itself supportable to the wretched individuals who compose it although at best it is but the illusion of an illusion. Unhappily the human mind that most unlucky accident of nature is not content with so humble a role. Go into the monkey house in the zoological gardens and you will see what I mean. You will see the human mind externalized as it were, you will see a never ceasing hopping and skipping about, a running along aery perches bear fights with rotten pears and peaches, a hurried stuffing of every conceivable article in the animals cheek pouches, hasty ejection of the same by said animals in a rage, then a torrent of gibbering and scolding interspersed with various gesticulations indicative of deprecation and disgust, mutual vermin hunts in one another's mangy hides, with pantomimic mastications of the prey, and nothing settled or orderly save the perpetually recurring cycle of disorder and confusion. Such is an apt and admirable illustration of the nimble fatuity of the human intellect in the discursive round of speculation, its metaphysical and transcendental flights, its theosophical polemics, its hasty acceptance of any

tasty religious system or systems, its indignant rejection of the same, its political revolutions, its judicial systems with their flagrantly unjust and monstrously disproportionate castigation of its neighbours follies, and its social state in which nothing is fixed and constant save the merciless rigour with which false religious systems, the outcome of its own frothy imaginings, founded on little save caprice and vanity (and the martinetism and acid tyranny with which ridiculous and fleeting fashions, social conventions and ludicrous petty restraints and irritating points of etiquette) are imposed, act combining in their operation the stupidly recurring flightiness of a weather cock pirouetting by fits and starts and mechanical jerks on the church steeple and the sombre fanatical, pertinacity of a loadstone in a deep mine. Such is human society in its true essence. At first it allures the young soul with shows and semblances of something delightful to be enjoyed, unrevealed as yet, for humanity vain in its abject misery is never satisfied until the individual is wretched and happy in its own way, that slakes its hate and soothes its vanity, then it hisses in the novice's ears, with an undertone of menace words something to the following effect:—"You shall live as we live, enjoy only the things we enjoy, hate what we hate, worship what we worship, if we adore as inspired truth a tissue of contradictory nonsense you shall adore it too, as inspired truth, if we prostrate ourselves aye prostitute ourselves before a gibbet, you shall do so too, what makes us vile shall make you vile, having tasted our delights you shall be tortured by their withdrawal, your face wrung awry like ours by their sour aftertaste you shall be our epitome our excrescence, a bottle filled with our acidulous nectar, until before you dreamt of it old age quintupled by our shrewd methods is upon you and you potter forward to your nameless grave, a bundle of tattered prejudices, slaving your shirt front with old, oft-conned worthless saws of cynicism, working your stubbly chin, grey with a three days growth of bristles as your toothless and

chapfallen jaws munch and mumble their well chewed unpalatable fare—our exploded catchwords, our exploded cantworlds political and religious till you drop at last fluttering, grovelling, expiring into your coffin—like a ragged superannuated crow. “Such is the message of terrestrial dualism, of the man-apes’ social Lie, his cant and his religion to every new-comer within the grip of the earth circle—as with a circlet of linked steel it wrings the life out of him in drops of blood and call that life which is only its squandering, its effusion. Man-ape society may be likened to a hangman’s coil of twine or twist which in virtue of its essential twyness or dualism runs up into numberless kinks and harlings so that the human wretch Demagorgon the hangman operates upon is not hanged right out at once, but by jerks as the kinks and harlings unravel themselves by his weight, first he is almost strangled then a kink untwists and he falls through an interval of agonized relief then his throat is again icebound so to say by the harlings again his weight conquers, till habit and custom teach him to feel in this succession of throttlings and plunges, something he calls the enjoyment of existence though it be but a charnel house phosphorescence that mocks and masks the light. Society is not a simple reflection of natures’ illusive dualism. Its inherent property of reflection tends, from being what it is, to reproduce and reduplicate itself from innumerable detached and contrasted facets in innumerable cross rays and reflections till everything becomes a chaos of broken lights, in fact only another name for darkness. What remedy is there for all this. Only one. For the individual to think for himself and resolutely to abjure the teachings of society and the systems of religion those huge Monti di Pietà where the heaped up vices of ages are supposed by perpetual repetition to be reborn and reconstituted as one all-saving truth. Let us put all that wisdom has to say on this subject into the nut-shell of a paradox. The best religion is to have none at all. The best existence is not to

exist at all. What in presence of these ultimate truths do all our pretentious ceremonials, processions, banner flappings judicial injustice, head choppings, torturing, heretic burning and apes-tricks generally look like. Here are the two great truths that quell once and for ever the whole hideous route of inspired or rather inflated apes satyrs and demons in their dance macabre of insane contortions and mad gesticulations. A word and the flickering shadows are all gone with the imaginary deities, the objectively conceived phosphorescence of our own brains, that flung them upon the background of nature. And here another truth emerges from the dimness of earth-existence:—this namely that it is by the perversion of his brain-forces to system mongering and religion-spinning that the man-ape creates the social hell and the earthly torments from which he suffers. Only by resolutely shaking down his card houses of social and religious etiquette in the widest sense until he tires of the futile task of building them up again can reason hope to wean the imitative man-ape from aping his own social reflection and from battenning on social claptrap and to bring him face to face with simple nature and teach him to imitate that. We cannot break down the inherent natural illusive dualism but we can get rid of its innumerable counterfeits and find our comfort and satisfaction in facing it. The simplicity of classic paganism was after all the truest because the most natural—the most genuine form of thought. The complex fanaticism of Judæa which transplanted to the hotbed of decadent Rome throve in its festering artificiality and blossomed into the long neronian night of the middle ages, a night illumined only by the smoky glare of burning heretics, enlivened only by the shrill wolf-fang of ignorance, superstition and terror and the sobbing of immured nuns so throve and flourished because it was a lie. What remains for us in these days is to bury the shameful superstition as decently as we can, and warned by its gigantic failure to cease henceforth and for ever

the pernicious task of religion mongering. RELIGION—there is the ever present enemy of human purity, health and goodness—the needless go-between between man and nature, like lady Macbeth who typifies it, a bloody murderess in the past, in the present a crazy maniac vainly endeavouring to wash the blood stain from its hands, after its blood orgies at once mind-affected and mind-affecting. Mais revenons à nos moutons to our classical Arcadia. In this case Arcadia is situated in the not too odoriferous purlieu of upper Rathbone Place. But what happened there is too important for the end of a chapter. Let us begin a fresh one.

CHAPTER IV

MODERN ARCADIA

I had shaken myself free from superstition not without a pang: not altogether unscathed. The priestcraft of a moribund cult is one of the most insidious of all the manifold appliances of the Evil one. And the more spiritual a creed is the more subtle and diabolical is its priestcraft. The mummeries of Exeter Hall are more profoundly corrupting than the merry pranks of the Lupercalia, the vagaries of Morality than the excesses of a healthy and exuberant animalism. No one wholly escapes the contamination of modern Faith. Some of my fleece I had left in the monster's fangs, but I had cleared the abyss:—it was some satisfaction to look back and see the wolfish eyes glaring at me from the rapids. To see the woolly fragments drop from the ravening jaws as the drowning beast of prey opened them for the last time to utter one deprecating, disconcerted yelp ere it was swept over the cataract of roaring waters to perish irretrievably in the maelstrom below. Then came religion's bloated brother cynical worldliness with whom she was wont to raven paw to paw and fell to fell, worldliness with his kennel of commonplace, his spiteful envy

towards anything raised above the function of the rat-pit and the rabbit-warren, his canine conventionalism, his ingrained conservatism, more contemptible perhaps but also for that very reason less dangerous than his half-sister religion. "Drub all that nonsense out of him, make him trot like us behind the dogcart; that's proper right you are; now we have him" yelped the mangy animal. A kick sufficed. He kennelled snarling. And I was free. But freedom, especially speculative freedom also has its drawbacks. Having gone behind the scenes, having discovered that the play is all folly and illusion, it is so hard to conform and submit to the pretentious lie, to know where one ought to bend, where to be flint how to preserve ones individuality while wheedling the human cockpit out of its smiles and halfpence. And yet this is half the battle, at any rate it is the secret of success in life. But then is success worth attaining? Is it not best to pass through the arena of existence into which we were flung without any will of our own and leave like the camel in the desert no trace of our passage in its shifting sands? However this may be, most of us are necessarily compelled to affect at all events a belief in the illusion, to nod and assent to it as one would to the narrative of a spiritualist or the ravings of a theosophist whose delusions are too deep rooted to be worth refuting. This I have failed to do, hence my grip of the surface, of the objective, is perhaps too slight. Enough. We are now in Arcadia, aged twenty eight, the Arcadia of an idyllic life which diffuses itself about the purlieus of Upper Rathbone Place. It is a region of greasy pastry cooks shops, steaming fish shops, unodorous oyster bars and disreputable archways with shabby disreputable figures sloping unsteadily through them, an Arcadia where the shepherds are frequently at quarter-staff, and where swarms of dirty children take the place of genuine Arcadia's laniferous flocks of mutton. Here are shops of foreign workers in iron, working goldsmith's studios, electricians, Jews, Italians, retreats of cosy

ballet-girls and attics of would-be prima donnas whose voices, flung indignantly from garret windows blend with the squallings of matutinal cats and can be heard as far as Oxford Street startling the demure shopmen of Parkins' and Gotto and inflicting untold torments on Novello's more sensitive ears and hands. Here are mysterious clubs and coteries of doubtful character, seedy patriots of various foreign nationalities, flinging their denunciations of the powers that be into the rank atmosphere of tumble down pot-houses and smoky bar-rooms, causing however less inconvenience to society thereby than the more blatant crescendos of the tile and chimney pot prima donna inflict from her coin of vantage in the attic. Here too, as the sun set and night's constellations rose to gem the sky "oft I saw the great Orion slowly sloping to the west" in the shape of a portly Oriental generally a son of Israel with a stout gold watch chain to represent the famous nebula, wending his way to the west-city theatre of his choice, generally the one whose spectacular display most nearly realised the seraglio of his oriental fancy. It would be hopeless to attempt to enumerate a tithe of the strange arts and strange figures comprised in the human menagerie occupying the quadrangle between Berners Street and Tottenham Court Road, to the West and East, and Oxford Street and Goodge Street north and south. When ethnology, as it will one day, has, like zoology, its ethnological gardens of live specimens, it will find a well stocked preserve in this unexplored oasis.

But among its various tribes my story compels me specially to select one for mention—the caste of fan-painters who have their habitat in the neighbourhood of Newman Street. These people are largely recruited from among Hindoos whose native art and nimbly developed fingers find free scope and just the sort of work which suits them in the task of fan-painting. They are frequently to be met with in Charlotte Street and about Upper Rathbone Place dressed in Anglo-Indian costume,

wearing a long black morning coat and a black fez or sometimes a white turban. What bearing this has upon the course of my narrative, the sequel will show. And now perhaps the reader will like to know what sort of a retreat I had myself found in these pleasant pasturages. It was an apartment on the ground floor consisting of a sitting room looking out upon one of the broad streets which run parallel with Oxford street to the north of it and debouch in Tottenham Court Road. To the back of this room was a bedroom looking into a paved court below the level of the roadway and surrounded by rabbit hutches inhabited by lop eared rabbits, the possession of one of the children of my landlord, who had once been a keeper on a nobleman's estate and had no doubt transmitted his love of animals to his offspring. The respectability of the establishment was vouched for by the fact that the previous occupier of the room had been a curate of the parish and indeed a faint odour of sanctity still hovered about the place and was still perceptible in the form of an occasional whiff of stale tobacco.

On the opposite side of the street was a surgeon's house and next to it a foreign hotel which was of some notoriety in the neighbourhood. It was known as the Hotel de la Boule d'or and was celebrated as the place where Felice Orsini devised his plot to assassinate the Emperor Napoleon the third. Here perhaps he elaborated the bombs which still bear his name, here, no doubt, he pored over his Julius Cesar and imagined himself a second Brutus; from this hotel it was he set out upon the murderous expedition which ended so tragically for himself. The Hotel itself seemed still to exhibit in its outer self a reminiscence of the bloody thoughts which had once seethed within it, within the fiery circle of the conspirators distracted brain. Red blinds glowed at night in the two lower windows and above the porch hung a lamp of red glass, the middle of each pane occupied by a yellow disc to represent the golden cannon ball. I thought of the crimson failing sun of the late

summer evening four and twenty years ago and the blood stained rag behind the stove. They had followed me, had become eternalized, were being inwoven into the texture of my existence. "Che sarà sarà" what will be will be I said to myself. The house in which I had taken up my abode was only partially furnished and the other lodgers were of a somewhat problematical nature. During the day my landlady's children played about the uncarpeted staircase with a neighbours' child a little older than themselves, whom they constantly addressed in a monotonous singsong as they danced up and down like motes in the sun-beam:—"Little Nellie Destin, Little Nellie Destin" they chanted it over and over again. Until at last the phrase "it is Destiny" formed itself in my brain as a kind of reverberation to their singing. Up the uncarpeted staircase to the unfurnished drawing room on the first floor above my room, fluttered stealthily of an evening a mysterious whitey-brown looking youth, he might have been a clerk in some office, with a flute, flageolet or some other æolian instrument of torture. Arrived at the desolate drawing room he proceeded to produce a correspondingly desolating melody upon his shepherd's pipe (we are in Arcady remember), a melody founded I believe upon several then in vogue at the Gaiety burlesque and in very slow time. When he had reached about the middle of the tune, he almost invariably stopped dead short, so that the performance resembled nothing so much as a funeral procession in which the horses dragging the hearse gib when half way up the hill to the cemetery, sometimes he succeeded in reaching the goal of his desires the final close and then there was a long pause of self-satisfaction but most often the stream of music dried up half way, like a rivulet that careering joyously towards the sea, incontinently precipitates itself into a desert and finds itself prematurely swallowed up in the sanddrifts. Not to be behind hand in these posies of delights, I contributed my mite in the form of various major scales, indifferently performed on a rattling piano-

forte in the room below. And when the heavy drays rattled along the ill-paved street outside, you may imagine that the harmony was complete.

Our audience was a limited one. It consisted, besides the landlord and landlady and their family, of a mulatto governess with a terrific temper, translated by an inability to pay her weekly bills, from floor to floor or so to say from heaven to heaven till she had at length attained a cærulean paradise among the rafters of the top story. And this solitary auditor was not ours for long. I was ostensibly reading law. That is to say I ate sundry ill cooked dinners at one of the Inns of court, consulted works on philology in its Library and subscribed to Mudie's. The latter had furnished me with a small work on Hinduism by Professor now Sir Monier Williams, a sort of preliminary study to his great work on the Religions of Hindustan. It was Saturday; the lamp in my room was lit, but the evening was so fine that I had not yet shut in. I had been reading of the worship of Shiva and was now engrossed in a description of the cruel goddess Kali, the swarthy impersonation of Time, the savage deity whose shrine is in a rocky gorge near Calcutta which is named after her, who wears a necklace of human skulls and who is the only divinity in Hindustan to whom the blood of animals, especially of goats, is offered. This impersonation of the destructive power of Time is the favored patroness of the Thugs and may perhaps in days gone by have been worshipped by the Zincali that mysterious people whose name is such a puzzle to philologists some of whom derive it from a word signifying a mongrel race while others believe it to mean the black people from India. However, this may be, I had just read the words "the savage goddess Kali is also propitiated with the blood of . . ." when as if to emphasize the statement in the book a sudden glow of crimson suffused the room. I started up, a little surprised at the strange coincidence and hurried to the window from which the glow seemed to proceed, just

in time to see the waiter in the Hotel de la Boule d'or drawing down the red blind of the second window on the ground floor. The other crimson blind was already drawn down and doubtless had been the cause of the sudden flash of crimson light that had penetrated to my apartment. I had scarcely left the window before a hubbub of angry voices in the hall of our house reached my ears. I could distinguish broken voices and sentences:—"Kill you, that I will. I'll teach you to strike my wife"—the English Christian's favourite national oath beginning with a D.—"Take that you."—Then followed a wail of suddenly felt suffering and something bumped against the dado of the hall.

At this point I opened the door of my room and looked out to see if I could be of any use, for it seemed I might at a moments notice be left so to say an orphan in the world, and what state of orphanhood could be more pathetic than to be deprived at a single blow of landlord and landlady those indispensable ingredients to the English social plum pudding without which according to our conservative philosophers it would lose all its spice and flavouring. I looked out upon a scene of considerable confusion. The unfortunate mulatto governess was jammed against the wall sobbing profusely and wiping a bloody nose, she was of a livid green colour, I suppose the Mulatto equivalent of deadly pallor, and held a bundle of cloths and a seedy looking umbrella. My landlord and landlady were gesticulating wildly and several of the children were running about pulling their parents skirts and coat-tails.

The worthy couple appealed to me in incoherent phrases.

"She struck my wife on the breast." "Yes it might have killed me." "I gave it her and served her right", "Yes and I'll do it again too, that I would if I were to hang for it." Thus appealed to I explained my view of the situation which was that scenes of violence were bad form, that it was desirable under any circumstances to

preserve the rules of politeness and etiquette, that hearts and heads could both be broken far more effectually from the inside than from the outside and that in my opinion they had better all kiss and make it up again, but as this douche of commonsense only seemed to exasperate them and increase the hubbub, I beat a retreat to my room and shut the door not without difficulty for the mulatto lady seemed to be determined, if murdered she was to be that it should be done on the only Brussels carpet in the house. Such is the littleness of female spite, strong even in the hour of death and disaster. Having barricaded my door I awaited the course of events, "at any rate when they have exterminated one another they will perhaps listen to reason", I said to myself, "at any rate, I can see to the corpses being decently interred". Matters, however, were not destined to turn out so tragically. After a little more scuffling in the passage outside I heard the front-door slam violently and my landlady came into my room puffing but radiant with satisfaction to say that they had got rid of the unfortunate mulatto who had beat a retreat to a home for destitute governesses where according to mine hostess she ought to have gone long before. The violence of her temper and the irregularity with which she paid her rent, had for some time rendered her a source both of dread and suspicion to the other inmates of the house and as the combined charms of the flute and the piano as performed by myself and the whitey-brown fogleman upstairs had had, owing to some strange unaccountable idiosyncrasy in the poor lady's brain, diametrically the opposite effect to that of David's harp upon the morose tyrannical Saul, we were unanimously agreed that her case must indeed be a hopeless one and that we were well quit of her.

The incident which I have just narrated was not the one alluded to on a previous page of this veracious history as too important to be left for the end of a chapter. The Mulatto governess drops out of our story

and we shall hear no more of her. Neither the melodious flutings of the whitey-brown fogleman in the unfurnished drawing room, nor the rattling drays in the street outside, nor piano-forte scales as strident and interminable as the creaking stairs that led to her cerulean garret in the attics ever charmed her back again. But as connected in time at any rate with the event to which was due or apparently due the development of what may be called the ultra terrestrial experience I have to relate it seemed to deserve to be briefly recorded in the narrative.

CHAPTER V

A SACRIFICE TO SIVA

How strange is the interaction of mind and mind has become a commonplace of us moderns but it is only since yesterday that the fact has been deemed worthy of serious scientific investigation. The healthy materialism of our times has no doubt suggested the need of some such investigation. While thought was held to be something separate from matter such investigations which must obviously be experimental in their method seemed to be only useless trifling, but when thought came to be conceived of as having an objective side as being in fact a complex of forces of which the brain was either the producer, the focusser or the blending of the two, then it was only a question of time how soon the investigation should begin. And a strange phenomenon has been seen as one of the results of a line of experiments which have a vast future before them. Materialism has been spiritualized in the process without however losing its solid reliance upon facts and practical reasoning. Or rather perhaps it would be better to say that materialism has been mysticized. Mary and Martha, Maya (the Illusion) and Mata, the measurer or earth-mother, spirit and matter have not indeed changed places but the latter

is no longer looked upon as the thing it appears to our untrained senses to be—a field of earth clods which create the crop of spiritual phenomena but rather a complex of forces in two or perhaps one or perhaps several subtle media of which two are now recognized as existing—the primitive atom and the luminiferous ether; unless indeed the atoms are an indefinite number of closed force rings existing for ever in the infinite sea of ether. Something analogous to what occurs in the field of what we call dead nature has happened to ourselves in the evolution of animal forms consequent upon the gradual cooling of the solar system, and of our planet the earth who gets its heat from the sun. If we imagine the whole system of celestial bodies to be a gas of which the suns, planets, etc., are the atoms then the inevitable cooling of these atoms will bring about condensation and consequently collision between the atoms. From the tremendous evolution of force on these occasions the colliding atoms are transformed into celestial oceans of incandescent matter which as it cools and condenses manifests itself to us as white, blue, yellow and red suns and stars. The process is eternal like the breathing of an animal that is incapable of death. On the surface of the earth the gradual cooling has produced an imitation or mimicry of the above process in miniature in the sphere of what we call animated nature. For as the human atoms have increased in number, they have been compelled to condense into nebulae, suns and solar systems—cities, states and nations.

Hence the brain forces which were emptied out so to say into the field of nature—in hunting animals through uncultivated forests—or tenting flocks over illimitable plains—being drawn into closer contact with one another have manifested a totally different series of phenomena under civilisation, from what they did in a state of barbarism or nomadism.

Just as the dead icecold suns, colliding flashed into oceans of light so mind in complex states of society has

become self-luminous, clairvoyant through the collision of individual minds. Here we have a phenomenon at once spiritual and material or in other words mystical, but also as is being now fully recognized one capable of experimental research. Hence the interest which attaches to the action of mind upon mind in trance or other abnormal states whether brought about mesmerically, by the use of drugs, through illness or simply as a consequence of the subject's process of existence. As in what follows the last and perhaps the second of these two causes seem to have been at work the foregoing general observations appeared not to be altogether out of place.

Our saturday night then closes as in all orthodox christian cities it should do—with a row; sunday rose as in all orthodox christian cities it should do—monotonously dull. In all effort in all motion and activity there is an element of something sacred, something impassioned, but what is there to inspire feelings of religious emotion in the sunday morning streets of a great metropolis, as they stretch away in a dusky perspective empty swept and garnished after their previous night's orgy, like the consciousness and palate of a drunkard after a nocturnal debauch, or like the camping ground of a detachment of militia or volunteers after a week's training in the open country. Here are straw coverings of Champagne bottles trampled in the gutter, here a few scattered cabbage leaves or stalks of cauliflowers, while a crumpled piece of newspaper stained with raspberry juice, under the impulse of the gusty morning and pursued by a few derisive dust-eddies, staggers across the street as though it were the ghost of the tippler to whom we have but too fitly compared the street itself. Humanity in its rests and pauses is but an embodiment of the vacancy of sin's after-math of the nothingness of Death's dust-pan, it is only in the perpetual, serene activity of nature that the physical and mental nature reposes and replenishes itself, as the pearl diver rises to the surface to respire after the strain of a long dive. The dreary

monotony of the English Sabbath has at all events one great advantage to offer to the dwellers in great cities:—by closing all museums and places of public resort it drives them out of the stuffy unhealthy churches and out of the fetid exhausted air of the streets into the open country—on to Surrey heaths and Sussex downs to Kentish watering places and Essex woodlands. The sultry air of late summer is unsupportable in London on the day of rest, hanging over the pavement unstirred and unventilated, without the movement of the enormous week-day traffic to set it in circulation. I therefore followed the popular drift and spent my Sunday somewhere in the environs generally, being fond of botany and natural history in the boro wesh as the Gipsies call Epping forest or on some Surrey heath with its pine clad sand hills. This particular Sunday I spent—I forget at which particular one of nature's sanctuaries in which the neighbourhood of London is happily so rich. No city except Stockholm, that I know of is so favoured in this respect. Stockholm offers the most striking contrast perhaps anywhere between the dusty fugitive civilisation of the man-ape and the eternal civilisation of that nature from which he sprang and into which he must return. There you step out of the dusty street across a few hundred yards of building ground and are at once in a primeval forest. An endless series of rock and dell stretch out in all directions, the rocks covered with a thick fleece of mosses and gigantic lichens every slope of every hill and dell with an inexhaustible banquet of bilberries. In autumn nobody need starve in Stockholm. He has only to go into the wood, filch from the birds a few of their berries, from the grubs and beetles a few of their wood mushrooms or boleti, and he has wherewithal to satisfy his pangs of hunger for a week or more. Then he has only to repeat his visit and replenish his exhausted larder. This striking contrast between nature's calm and man's spasmodic activity, between the forest life of beast and bird and our own town existence raises

a suspicion in one's mind whether our boasted supremacy in the Universe is not after all a delusion of our own. Nature and nature's life are supreme in their simplicity, ours in the complexity of its artificial surroundings and in the development of the brain and nervous system on which all that complexity depends and from which it originates. But recollect that in making complexity and brain development the standard of excellence and perfection, we are simply accepting the assumption of a complex-developed brain which is naturally predisposed to look upon complexity of brain development as the standard by which to measure the height and depth of everything. Take other excellences and classify existences according as they possess them or fall short of them and we should be simply nowhere in the scale of being. If we substitute intuition for the laborious processes of nerve-thought, simplicity for complexity, rapidity of motion for the permanence of city life and existence of intimate union with external nature for artificiality and declare intuition to be better than nerve-thought's laborious processes, simplicity than complexity, rapidity of motion and change than permanence, intimate union with external nature, than our own artificial life, then we are surpassed even on this planet earth by many forms of bird life. And no doubt it is from an uneasy consciousness of the possibility under some planetary conditions of bird life developing into infinitely higher forms of existence than our own that has led human beings from very early times to imagine a race of spiritualized and winged human beings such as the Christian's angel, the Greek's Psyche, and the Jew's archangels and cherubims and the mysterious winged figures frequent upon the Assyrian sculptures of Niniveh and the Egyptian sarcophagi. Another strong assumption against brain civilisation being the highest mode of being is the enormous amount of dirt and squalor its development produces in the field of nature, rapidity of motion is only attained to at the cost of blackening and defiling immense

tracts of land and air, the multiplication of our race only at the same heavy cost, our union with nature is of the most imperfect kind, our cities are huge sinks of filth and vice and even our brains of which all this equivocal civilisation is the product, are only developed to perpetuate it at a grievous risk to our physical and moral health. How different in many ways how much higher is the civilization of the swallow. Human beings have dimly recognized the superiority of this bird's existence to their own, for when they wish to cut a pretty figure of an evening, they don a ludicrous imitation of the bird's graceful form which they call a swallow-tail coat. Above all glories is the glory of motion; it is the closest union we can conceive of with inanimate nature; the rapid blending of blood with the oxygen of the air and the consequent burning of waste tissues is the nearest approach to a blissful disembodiment that we can attain to in this life. But what a glory, then, looked at from this point of view, the swallow's life must be. Instead of the smouldering ash-heap of city life, like an expiring sun, a mass of smudge and dross and garbage how vivid must be the swallow's intimate union with nature, as, feeding on the wing it skims swift, no swifter than thought itself, from end to end of the glittering mere or the twinkling brook, flashing forth like the young white-hot suns in the heyday of their glorious youth. How perfect is this existence if simplicity and not complexity be the standard of excellence, and yet how varied as year by year they shift with the sun from hemisphere to hemisphere reflecting the planet's apogee and perigee, that block on which all plant and animal life are shaped and modelled, in their alternating courses. And their death after a quickly glowing flame of perfect health how natural, how easy, little more indeed than a light transition from one form of motion to another. There is something deeply pathetic to my mind in the light fluffy skeleton of a swallow lying motionless and dead among dead kexes and nettle stalks. The contrast between the

shuttle-life of the bird's living self, and the frail shell lying there so motionsless, all the eddying forces that lodged within it emptied out into the boundless ocean of inanimate nature is an epitome of our own life history and strikes a chord in our human hearts. It has a story to tell us too—a story with a moral to it; for it tells us that the bird life and ours is but one and the same thing, and that any immortality, we may hope for will be shared, with the meanest living thing, at the end of its life day: it like ourselves will receive its mite. What a lesson to human pride and how deeply needed at the present day! To return to my story, to return to the Arcadia of Rathbone Place after this breath of a Surry heath with the mantling pool in the shady pinewood and the swallows and sand martens flitting over it. On this particular sunday, I wandered through the woods much as usual, but it is distinguished from other sundays by the capture of a fine living specimen of a stags horn beetle. I had never found one before and, securing him safely in a strongboard box with some holes in the lid for him to breathe through, I brought him home in triumph. Arrived at my lodgings, I closed in, put the card board box with the stags horn beetle in it upon the bookshelf and had tea. When the tea-things were cleared away I took down Monier Williams' book upon Hinduism and began to read. On Sunday Arcadia's flute and the whitey-brown shepherd who played upon it were both mute and I also in deference to the feelings of my Sabbatarian Scotch landlord also ceased to thrid the Jacob's ladder of the scales. I had plenty of time therefore for reading and read on and on. I read of Vishnu the god of love and mercy and then of Siva the god of destruction, the god of dissolution and reintegration also in a deeper sense a god of law and mercy replacing what was doomed to perish, by what was quick with life, a jealous god but also a just one. Perhaps the Jew's stone god Jahveh was after all only a materialized parody of the mysterious Aryan deity—the third person of that wondrous Trinity

which the Vedantic intuition has created. Siva, like Jahveh (the names are the same) was worshipped through the medium of a stone, generally an upright pillar to symbolize the mystic linga whose fiery activity at once productive and destructive had to be propitiated by constant aspergings with water and offerings of cooling leaves. And what marvellous powers the worship of the god's wife Parvati conferred upon the devout and persevering believer the book also taught me. Certainly some of the magic spells from the Mantras and Tantras as such for instance as the one where the thaumaturgist is to imagine his spirit winding through the spiral nerve of his body into the seventh heaven and then to repeat om to the right eye om to the left eye pah! to the stomach bah to the lungs bah, to the liver—faugh to the kidneys and so forth, and so forth, were rather calculated to provoke a smile in the sceptical European than any particular feeling of awe and reverence. But after all could all this amazing superstructure of folly and superstition have been erected on an air bubble? Hinduism in many of its conceptions notably in its doctrine of evolution, and its belief in the antiquity of the world, and the occurrence of cycles, æons or Kalpas of immense duration was far more in harmony with the truths revealed by modern science than was the ludicrously narrow minded chronology of Christianity and Judaism:—was not all truth one, was not the religion which was the truest in its speculative and metaphysical portion more likely to be true under other aspects also, than creeds which were demonstrably a tissue of falsehood and deceit historical as well as speculative.

At any rate there was only one test of truth in this world-experiment. I had already tested the efficiency of Christian prayer and found it but an empty delusion—was there any kernel of truth to be found in the hard nut of gnostic Saivism! Experiment was the only test. I would apply it. Not by muttering any of the absurd formulas from the Tantras but by a genuine sacrifice to

Siva embodied in a rational active form, a living sacrifice to one who was the god of reason, activity and life, a sacrifice in which the destructive element of his godhead should also receive recognition in waste of tissue caused by violent exercise. That would be a true union with nature and nature's mysterious god. Perhaps it would tell one something that Christianity had been powerless to explain. But how to apply the test. I read on and came in my reading to a description of some of the outlinings common in the Hindoo temples and which are supposed to represent the linga of Siva. Either the description was so clear that it has left upon my mind a picture of one of these or an actual tracing was given in the book. However, this may be I here reproduce an outline of the idealized symbol. It has the appearance of a pair of scissors standing on their base or handles.

An idea occurred to me. For the sake of divine health I generally went three or four times a week before breakfast to the piece of water in the Regents Park, took a boat there and sculled for an hour or so round the lake. It was rather a monotonous exercise, but it sent one home with a keen appetite for breakfast and well oxygenized blood. In the piece of water which is of an irregular shape running southward into a long tongue are two islands situated pretty much in relation to this tongue in the position of the handles in the above diagram. It occurred to me that I could offer an appropriate sacrifice to Siva, by concentrating my thoughts upon the mysterious attributes of the god while tracing out his symbol on the lake by rowing first round the island to the right then, after circling it, by going up one side and down the other of the long tongue of water, then circling the island to the left, and finally joining my original track and repeating the whole process. The following diagram roughly represents the pieces of water and the linga symbol as it was to be traced out by the course of the boat. This religious performance I determined to carry out before breakfast on the following monday morning,

and having looked to see that the stagshorn beetle was safe in his cardboard box I took my bed candle, turned off the gas and went to bed. I rose about half past five or six next morning, put on my things and went out. It was a lovely fresh summer morning, not a cloud to be seen anywhere. I turned the corner into Charlotte Street and was walking briskly along when a figure met me which under the circumstances strangely arrested my attention. It was that of a magnificent Hindoo, most likely one of the fan-paiters, I have mentioned above, who was on his way to work in Newman Street or Rathbone Place. He was a tall and stately looking man, carefully and well dressed, in a sort of close fitting frock coat of good black material with dark trousers and a sort of high fez or Persian cap also made as far as I recollect of fine black cloth. But it was not his dress or superb figure so much as his striking physiognomy which at once rivetted my attention. His complexion was dusky olive but not to be called swarthy his brows were squared, and his straight but by no means thick or shaggy eyebrows were of a jet black colour. So also was his well grown moustache whiskers and beard; the latter by no means long or flowing was parted down the middle of the chin and blended with the whiskers as is often the case with persons of Austrian nationality who wear their beards. His nose was classical; his whole face one may say flawless; the natural material outblossoming of the inner man or mind, like a spring of crystal water that exactly fills its self-excavated basin. He stood there upright as a pillar of cast iron a silent protest from the past against our western creed and its hideous outblossoming in filth and squalidness. It was only for a moment in passing that I regarded him but in that instant in spite of the difference of nationality, I felt a sort of dispassionate affection for him and that feeling which one has with some people and which is so entirely absent with others:—that I could learn from him. He passed me very slowly and looked shrewdly at me as though he

was aware of my intended sacrifice to Siva. Perhaps he was. Perhaps he read my thoughts. He seemed altogether above his surroundings. Perhaps he too was a votary to Siva. I cannot say. My mind was full of his personality even after I had passed him; but when I looked back he was already out of sight. Soon my mind began to busy itself further about him. Who was he? What was his vocation, was he merely a common fan-painter? Or was he perhaps a missionary of some mystic cult sent from India to attempt the conversion of barbaric Christendom? Where did he live? What were his pursuits? My imagination began to weave a thousand extravagant romances and was about to discover in him an incarnation of the blessed one of the incarnate Siva himself when I found myself at the side of the lake at the spot where boats were let out for hire. Having chosen one, a heavy outrigger I rode to the islands and began the spell or sacrifice whichever you may choose to call it dwelling in mind on the attributes of the blessed One and linking him in my mind with the majestic Hindoo I had met in Charlotte Street. It was a tedious pastime:—never did an hour seem to lag so long, but it was over at last and I set off homewards with a hearty appetite for breakfast. Should I find a black edged envelope on the table when I reached my rooms an announcement of some family misfortune or did the spell require time to work. I felt on this particular morning that in the cause of truth and science I should have no compunction whatever in sacrificing any number of relations with their narrow minds and stunted sympathies, their class exclusiveness, their petty domineering ways, their mean and selfish religion, their odious formalism, their contemptible littlenesses and conventionalities, their padded worldliness, their puff-powdered heartlessnesses, their steel and whalebone artificiality in the place of nature and nobility—these steel hearts and steel corsets, whose brief blossoming into nymph and naiad had so soon hardened into brass, whose human hearts had so soon become furred like an old tin

kettle with the calcareous deposit of their social mud-puddle; these monkeyfied automata aping one another's faults! Siva might have them by the batch and cart-load—particularly the wordly minded women among them—the weazels and civet cats—the fanfreluches with their snuffing muzzles, and sooty eyed poodleisms—with their sham superficial refinements—their whining vanity and affectations—with a yelp at the end of it when any one gave them a well-merited kick. Yes:—Siva might have them all to cut into bootlaces warranted genuine dogskin. I remember when I reached the end of Charlotte Street, hurrying to the baker's at the corner to buy some rolls; and feeling very cross with him for being so slow in giving me the change for a ravening appetite was beginning to devour my inside. Then I hurried to my rooms. The door opened outwards. I flung it open and rushed in with my head in the air. I took three paces forward not knowing where I trod—one for each of the three lobes of the sacred bilva leaf one for each of the three prongs of the sacred trident the trisula of Siva—and then crack! crunch! went something under my right foot. In a moment I realized what had happened. I lifted my foot and there was the flattened corpse of the unfortunate stag-beetle—crushed as utterly into space of two dimensions as the body of the Hindoo who has fallen underneath the car of Jaganath or that of the criminal who has been condemned by the Nizam to be tied underneath the foot of the elephant executioner and to be stamped to death by the gigantic Pachyderm. Worthless relatives might be easy—the harmless beetle it was who was fated to pay the debt of nature to the Great one. Sportively he showed me a sample of his power. More in jest than earnest. And yet, the sacrifice to Siva was complete. I went to the bookshelf; and took down the cardboard box. The beetle had eaten through the side and thus made his escape. How exactly our movements—mine and the beetle's must have tallied synchronized been correlated. Three minutes sooner and he

would have been safe under the table. Three minutes later and he would have crept safely under the door and out into the passage. And what fatality induced him to wander exactly in the direction which put him in the greatest danger of being unwittingly trampled to death. Had I not been so hungry, had I not entered so hurriedly I should have seen him. And having breakfasted, having sat down and rested, I should have afterwards walked about more circumspectly.

I could not have failed to see so large an object moving about on the floor. But the magic spell had set the mysterious urn of circumstance turning and out of it had flown a tiny billet of death and fate, not a huge emblazoned scroll such as prognosticates the death of the mighty and the great, but merely the frayed fragment of a half eaten lotus leaf, prefiguring the death of the insignificant and the feeble. Yes. The Sacrifice to Siva was complete. Or was it?

CHAPTER VI

A RETROSPECT

Before narrating what I consider as the most remarkable event of my life, I wish to pause here a moment, to take stock as it were (To use a commercial phrase) of what has gone before to give a retrospective glance at the past and then to launch into the current of events which ended so strangely so mysteriously. And in doing so I shall not in any way deviate from a regular and orderly exposition of what happened nor indeed in the least degree break the continuity of my story. For as a matter of fact the day whose morning promised so much of summer splendour and summer glory became thickly overcast with clouds before midday and by the afternoon had degenerated into a dismal, melancholy drizzle. My music mistress had a bad cold and failed to come to give me a lesson and I was so fatigued

by the long day's outing on Sunday and the early row in the morning of the present day that I felt incapable of stretching my fingers on the rack of broken chords, but sat instead alternately scribbling and reading in a desultory sort of way. Then as the damp inclement afternoon gradually declined and the evening came moist with dew drops hanging from the eaves—came casting a sulphury threatening gleam of light about the street from under heavy brows of rolling purple clouds, I ceased even this lazy occupation and fell into reverie. There are times in our life when the present loses its hold upon us—times and occasions which seldom occur with most of us—when we see as on the stage of a theatre or in some magic mirror the accomplished fact—the eternity of our past life in all its minutest details; a hundred trifling events buried in the dust and smoke of every day life flash into our memory much as the broken fragments of a drop of quicksilver unite together to form one shining globule and we see it all like a tiny star lying deep, deep down below the cloudy strata of our waking and even of our sleeping consciousness. Just as sometimes in a mountain ramble we lose ourselves in the dense mist wreaths which hang about the summits—but all at once a rush of wind comes and blows the light cloud veil aside and we see fiery peaks and verdant valleys stretching away into illimitable distances—forms that by the apparent eternity of their solid state excite in our minds new ideas of the essence of reality and of what underlies the fleeting phantasmagoria of time and thought and space.

Now link, on link, as crag and peak emerges,
When o'er their brow the white winged mist is drifted
And all at once the watery veil is lifted
Then closes round its insubstantial surges
Peers out the solid past a chaos hurled,
Like the swift vision of an earlier world.

Something of the kind happened to me on this particular afternoon. At first my thought circled round the

mysterious Hindoo I had met in the morning. He too stood out against the tawdry background of the present much as the past itself, did, like a granite peak, the outsurging of some primitive molten strata at once underlying and dominating the thin cortex of living matter that festered upon the surface of our tiny world. And the past and the present were contrasted also as the ant-heap of the city and the calm of the woodland were:—the one with the intoxication of its bustling activity, the other with its calm repose and in-garnered energies. Looked at from this point of view the sobriety of practical life was but as a drunkards brawl, like the raspberry stained newspaper staggering across the Sunday morning street, like a giddy tippler pursued by derisive dust-eddies:—careless of the Personality which lay below the surface of things, it wrung the individual without mercy into a thousand grotesqueries, perverted the external semblance from the reality till the whole personal being and the whole of the social state composed of these personal units became—the illusion of an illusion, the dualism of a dualism. It was the harling and kinking of twine that so harled and kinked from the inmost essence of its nature, its essential dualism its twyness. The practical man was not practical at all in the true sense, he simply moved and had his being in the steamy glassy Paradise of a perpetual debauch. It was the poet the Dreamer who was the true practical man because he was in harmony with the tranquil spacious activities of nature and because he saw what he was doing in the complicated loom-work, saw the fabric he was creating, saw the one eternal—the accomplished fact his past life and that of others as it hung there down, deep down below the clouds of smoke and steam out of which it had been condensed. The Philistines who bit and tore and scratched and cursed each other in the mad rage for gaming and for getting on, who trampled down the individual, who defiled his soul, who prostituted his body, in their selfish civil war what were they and their

mouthings betier after all than the aimless gesticulations and gibberings of a cage full of gibbons and baboons. Passion and respect for the deep underlying consciousness of the child-nature, the dew-drop, the jewel that exists underneath all the dross and scurf even of the worldliest and the most sordid lives this passion and this respect for the hidden soul were the two master-keys which would open all the secret gates of the twin palaces of delight and truth. How had the ore (passion) been diverted from the personal to an artificial desire for the possession of material property, of wealth—to the imitation of nature and person in the form of art until it had created a huge refuse heap of cheap nastiness a Monte di Pietà—arrogantly vaunted as heaven inspired, because human civilisation, and enlightenment. Yes against all this the clear dew-drop of the past child life that lived in memory, natures calm self-contained existence of the woodland, of the steppe, of the Sahara, of the glacier and the snow fields, breathed an eternal defiance—so, too, did the Hindoo mystic's stately life of dignified because harmonious labour, a life whose visible material state, the body was but another expression of the invisible material state of what we call the soul, because although illusion (Maya) had caught him in her toils and he was born man, his true self lived in its true self of which the dew-drop of child life seen in memory is as a sort of phantasm, lived sphere within sphere, plane within plane, delight within delight, infinitely far away in the core of the core of nature, though ever present like the sunlight, lived self within self, a transfigured existence no longer amenable to Death or fear because it was already personal in its impersonality and at one with Brahm. But how grossly, too, had the other this very dew-drop of child life been besmirched and soiled, by the self-satisfied Phlistinism of the day, how the pearl had been trampled by the northern swine, until everything had been perverted and turned the wrong way, Passion been called vice, Passionlessness

virtue, joy and knowledge naughtiness, dullness and stupidity religion. How could it be otherwise? When individuality is ignored and unfelt, passion becomes a lava stream. One is the complement of the other, but mutually child and parent, both so correlated as to check each other's tendency to excess, develop both freely, and freedom becomes the highest Law.

My thoughts took another—a more matter of fact turn. I began to speculate whether the events of the morning had been the result of chance or whether possibly there might be some mesmeric jugglery at the bottom of them. If the Hindoo really was a mystic, really was an adherent of Siva really had a mission in England to disseminate what he considered to be the truth, might I not have been the subject of some sort of spiritualistic hocus-pocus. Two facts militated against this idea:—seemed in fact fatal to the possibility of entertaining it. In the first place whenever I had exposed myself to the tom-fooleries of the spiritualists it had always ended in a deadlock, the tables refused to turn when I sat at them, the mediums to mediate when I intervened, I was a hopeless obstacle to the manifestations a hopeless death's head at the feast of the spirit world; and in the next place how to account by any theory of this kind for the reciprocity between the movements of the stag-beetle and my own. Had he been mesmerized also and put en rapport with myself? I gave up this theory and adopted another. All was what we call chance—but underlying this world of chance was what we call fate; so that the coincidences which strike us in our course through the world though wholly the result of what we call accident, have a real significance, they give us momentary glimpses of the lava-sea below on which our seemingly free and active existence really depends, the moments and the fluctuations of which are the real cause of all that happens to us in our material life and into which we are again merged by death.

Just as the film of oil upon the surface of a river takes

on a thousand anaeboid forms and seems to move and shift by a self-evolved power while in reality it is impelled by the slowly moving mass of the current upon which it rests, so was it with the whole ordered course of our transient existence upon earth and the cooling process went on in our bodies that was but an epitome of the cooling process going on in the planet itself upon which we lived:—the glow of youth faded — the iron entered into our souls as the iron compounds which were indeed our very vitality itself grew harder, brittler, our whole bodies grittier, more materialized until at last the vital function became matter—logged and the whole system fell to pieces. Just as the planets and the suns, the celestial systems, cooled and contracted and by that very process were brought into collision and so colliding flashed in a instant into oceans of incandescent vapour, so it would be in death, the veil of matter would be burnt away, love, passion, delight, agony, all that it had once felt would rend the soul, would cleave it like the wail of a sea-mew on a barren coast and we should be no more. Would the human energies once manifested in us still cling about the world and flash into yet other states of consciousness when our planet would itself or perhaps the whole solar system be transfigured in a sea of molten glory by the clash of its destruction? Who could tell who could shake himself free now-a-days from all these harrowing doubts oh! Happier far after all were they who died in the full glory of their youthful illusion who felt the tempestous passion of death's agony and death's delight in death's fullest intensity, crushed out of all semblance of humanity on the field of battle, martyred in what they held to be some sacred cause, wrapt from this stubborn earth before the lust of life became fixed and hardened into life's bitter struggle as it slipped down the stony talus of the years, clutching at every shrub or herb, or large fragment of rock in the unstable heap, until it plunged at last into the ice-black lake below, and heard the lapping of the water against the sharp ledge,

plashing its inevitable close. As in a half, dream I heard the children on the stairs outside, dancing up and down, like motes in the sunbeams, chanting their monotonous refrain "Little Nellie Distin, Little Nellie Distin". "Yes it is all destiny" the resonance of my brain seemed to answer them, "we are only motes in the sunbeams". And closely connected with these ideas came another thought, that perhaps after all the Hindoo's mysterious personality, his mystic mode of being and habits of life had been predestined to clash with mine, and to influence my personality and mode of being-influence them without his being conscious of the fact, or perhaps sub-conscious only in the underworld of trance and contemplation in which his hidden life centered with all the thrilling extasies of mystic devotion. Then I began to trace back my own life in memory to its source. I seemed to see it lying down there below me like a sparkling rivulet in its valley, now sunning itself crystal clear as it ran under vine wreaths and acanthus leaves under the canopy of nature's summer heavens, unflecked by any taint of superstition, now glooming like a black snake where the sultry clouds of religion and bigotry hung their vapoury night above it, now turbid and defiled, where the thunder cloud had fallen and flushed it with the filth and garbage of greed and worldliness. What had that other life been, I wondered, drawn from the fiery orient, and rippling in a network of eternal fancy, that fate had drawn westward from its lotus covered fountain to join its streams with mine and form an eddy where they commingled? Here was a blank in the picture and my thought again involuntarily turned to the rivulet of its own evolution. I saw again the early communion with nature in the forest hayfield, when existence itself seemed suffusedly enshrouded in an amber light, like the tranquil shimmer of the midnight sun, when no hateful thought of a personal avenging God had been yet instilled into it to poison its inartificial harmony, when nature and self-being blended in one impersonal Personality were

their own religion, their own eternity. Grecian in its pure simplicity, that was an age when men were Gods and existence its own worship. Then the small cloud gathered no bigger than a man's hand. Religious catch-words were foisted into my brain. Religious dogma—heaven knows what. I remember being once awed, because one evening at bed-time, I got to the middle of the Lord's Prayer and then stuck fast. Then religion became mildly comic. There was the Sunday morning bustle, servants in livery, paws in dog-skin gloves and old fashioned prayer books in vellum and calf-skin; arrived at church there were the fusty pews, Anglican psalmody, and the horrible water torture of the litany, with the regular drip of its "Good lord gliver us'es" followed by the swish of the pump-spout as, after each pump handling by the parson, (The pompously pronounced "That it may please thee—. . ." Came the clinching clouch as we of the congregation flushed our souls with the ever recurring phrase:—"We beseech thee to hear us Good lord". Surely this horrible Christian exercise must have suggested to the Spanish inquisition the still more barbarous water torture with which they "exercised" their spiritual opponents:—unless, indeed, the vain repetitions of the litany were invented on the model of the torture, to be applied to the victim at and in the same time, the monotonous drip of the water as it fell upon the maddened brow regulating the equally monotonous drip of the canticle as it ate into the maddened brain. About this time we frequented a pew which was reached by a special wooden staircase outside the church. The pew itself (it exists there to this day) was slung like a hammock across the fine Norman arch of the channel of the church completely marring the effect of both. The outer wall of the pew was adorned with the circular dial-plate of an eight days clock which was solemnly wound up by the sexton after morning service, and which would have formed one of the most conspicuous objects in the church had it not been more or less hidden by an octangular

pulpit which with its octangular sounding board towered high above the clerk's more modest reading desk and the minister's spacious family pew that looked from above like a cattle pen. If I could ensconce myself in one of the corners at the edge of our pew, I was happy. I could then listen to the ticking of the clock and could calculate how many ticks there were between the consecutive "Goodlordgliveruses" and the "we beseech thee's" of the litany. I got even so far as to think out a litany machine for performing the same mechanically by means of clockwork on the principle of the Thibetan praying wheels. Then I looked down majestically upon the bald heads and the too luxuriant bonnets of the congregation and noted which of the men went to sleep and which prayed into their hats. The bald heads generally went to sleep, the luxuriant heads of hair prayed into their chimney-pots. Did the prayers combine chemically with the volatile oils of the Rowlands Macassar and produce that luxuriant growth of hair. That was a bold speculation and yet the generalization might be correct, though the theory was faulty. It was refreshing to turn to the greenery of the bonnets and from there to the young folk and notice which of them were kissing and flirting behind their prayer books, which of them suppressing unseemly laughter at the odd gestures of the clergyman. And then there was the never failing pantomime of the parson and the clerk, the punch and the punchinello of the performance, each striving to outdo the other, the unfortunate punchinello being perpetually worsted in the contest, while the parson soared in one continuous triumph from height to height and from glory to glory, culminating at last in the azimuth of the pulpit in a tremendous coruscation of oratorical fireworks. Perhaps it was a mere accident or perhaps the whole performance was intended to be typical of the contest between good and evil, between soul and body, between spirit and matter and the final triumph of the former. Seen from our coign of vantage, the final apotheosis was by no

means without its ludicrous side as the Cæsarean apotheosis must have been to the Pontifex who untrapped the eagle, or the writing on the wall to the Magi who focussed the magic lantern or the vibrations of the Memnonian statue to the Hierophants who adjusted the chords, or the oglings and benedictions of the blessed virgin to the smug Papists who rolled the eyes and pulled the strings. For our clergyman who was of Hibernian extraction and adorned with the fatal gift of eloquence, spoke with a strong Irish brogue and gesticulated freely. As he always wore a black college gown that was much too large for him, a slovenliness also perhaps of Hibernian extraction, the vehemence of his gesticulations displaced the collar of his gown which soon slipped down lopsidedly as far as his waist and he had to pause to heave anchor, so to say. In fact, the stream of his eloquence, like a river running through a sandy soil, was continually silting itself up and forming a bar which from time to time had to be removed by muscular efforts. Thus he was constantly hitching up his gown at the end of his periods and moved spasmodically and jerkily from one eternal verity to another, like a water mill on a small stream in summer time whose wheel pauses until the buckets fill, turns creaking through a small segment of a circle and then stands stock still again;—to us situated at the back of the orator and who were not in a position to see anything but the hocking of his nape up and down and the intermittant writhings and strugglings with the refractory gown, the effect was ludicrous in the extreme.

Perhaps it symbolized that last evanescent struggle between mind and matter, as I have supposed the rivalry between clerk and minister may have done throughout the earlier portion of the service. At a later period of life the little cloud gathered force and religion after being mildly and harmlessly comic became a terrific bug-bear, a task work, of indifferent Greek, a treadmill of insufferable Pauline epistles, analysed into subtleties of inter-

pretation which the author had certainly never himself been conscious of. Then the incubus of hairsplitting unreason at last became unbearable, the thunder-cloud burst, the floodgates of worldliness were unloosed, one saw at last by the flashes of lurid lightning how false the whole system had been, seeing what a hideous social chaos of misery and vice, of stunted and bloated lives it had begotten. There was a struggle with the swirling eddies of worldliness, of society, religion's other self, the body to its soul and I was free, Religion had no more hold upon me. I could contemplate it unawed in its hundred different forms. And what was this boaconstrictor Christianity which was supposed to have eaten up all the other serpents of the theological wilderness. The greatest minds of the day, very many of them at any rate, among them the greatest natural philosopher that had ever lived, had given a reluctant but final verdict against it all without exception, even its best friends were fain to throw into the back-ground its arrogant pretensions to infallibility and to the exclusive belief of mankind. And yet it was as ignorant and domineering as ever. How was it that at every new discovery of science this divinely revealed and true religion always espoused the side of darkness and misbelief. Theologians boasted that their supreme truths of religion gave them a right judgment in all things and certainly they acted on this belief through the long shambles of their cruel autocracy. How was it then that when science proved the world to be round, these heaven-lit lamps sputtered and glowered red with epileptic wrath, and protested that flat it was and flat dogma insisted that it should remain? How was it that as soon as it was known to be a globe they maintained that if a globe it was, at all events it was the center of the universe until science at length disposed of this fallacy also—and showed that the world was a mere speck in a practically unlimited sea of matter? How was it that after this hard fact had to be incontinently swallowed by the religious world, the theo-

logical Pundits, so intimate through divine revelation, with the scheme and purpose of their friend and patron the divinity they adored and whose designs they expounded with such childlike faith in their own deductions,—how was it that when science had demonstrated the immense antiquity of the world we live on and all other suns and planets the afore mentioned theological Pundits fought tooth and nail for their divinely revealed conviction that the world had been neatly turned out of box-wood not more than 7,000 years ago? How was it that when geology and common sense had pointed out that fossils were the embodied relics and exuviae of past æons of life upon this earth, infallible heavenly revealed truth at once descended with its anathemas branded all such notions as blasphemous and set its veto upon the truth? How is it possible to believe in the prejudiced deductions of theologians, however mathematical and highly trained, when one of the most mathematical, the most fair minded of the sorry crew, after summing up the arguments for and against the acceptance of fossils as genuine organic remains or merely *lusus naturæ* and entities *sui generis*, solemnly declares himself of the latter opinion, because to doubt it is to doubt the power of God to cause the solid rock by a kind of natural fervour and fermentation to create within itself these semblances and appearances of organic life? How was it that when the antiquity of the world had been proved and that of the animals that inhabit it, the demonstration of the antiquity of man wrought such havoc in breasts scraphic? How was it, finally, that after all these humiliating experiences, so ruinous to the claims to supernatural enlightenment they still maintained, these unabashed Defoes lashed themselves into a perfect frenzy of fanatical rage and defiance, as soon as the doctrine of the animal and purely natural origin of mankind as a species of ape was promulgated. No implement was too ignoble for their hands. Society and religion solemnly declared the discoverer of the riddle of the sphinx to have gone mad—

he the sanest since the Stagyrte—in a fruitless attempt to prove his theorem; how completely they proved it themselves by their valuable unintelligible gibberings and hieroglyphics, to be no better than a banyan tree full of howling apes and spider monkeys. How is it, last of all, that these indifferent Hanumans, not content with dogmatically asserting that their own religion, which as they hold it, is incompatible with proved scientific fact is the only perfectly true religion that has ever been revealed to man upon the earth, also assail with every contemptuous epithet expressive of disgust and horror religions which ages before Christianity was dreamt of foreshadowed the doctrine of evolution and distinctly stated that of the antiquity of the world, religions which, unlike the Christian, have been tolerant of their different sects, and whatever their faults as systems, have never taught the sanctity of the stake—the Christian's bloody spud for eradicating the weeds of false doctrine, religions which time in all probability will prove to be the parent tree of which Christianity itself is only a ricketty seedling. How was it? The reason is not far to seek. Almost at the very time that humanity was proved in reality Hanumanity, criticism had also shown that the evidence for the miraculous events which were supposed to prove a particular man to be also a god was quite insufficient, that the actual writers of the documents on which the Historical belief reposed were quite unknown, and that the copyists lived at a time when the Christian world was ready to believe anything and only, too unscrupulous alas! in palming off upon the world any lie that was likely to advance the cult of which they formed the hierarchy. For centuries and centuries, the Christian world had believed historical facts to be absolute final truths upon evidence which would have hardly been sufficient to burn a witch, what wonder if those who were especially initiated into its mysteries found themselves in a very short time utterly incapable of distinguishing between truth and falsehood? What wonder if

centering their whole existence upon a lie, they branded the mouths whose arguments they could not answer and found the gibbet and the fagot the surest way with men of genius and independence of thought? It is very awkward for the religious world to be left worshipping a monkey with the miracles left out, at the same time that they protest every other religion to be a degraded superstition although many of these religions are ethically almost identical with theirs and have not borrowed their ethics from Christianity, being of far higher antiquity than that particular belief. And then, too, how did the arrogant claims of Christianity appear when projected into those infinities of time and space revealed to us by natural philosophy? According to the theologians we were bidden to believe that the sacrifice on Calvary was for the sins of the whole universe—that the whole creation was under a ban till the author of the cultus by his death removed the curse. The infinite creation of infinite worlds all found salvation because a tiny little Hanuman was butchered by his fellow Hanunans in an obscure nook on a minute speck of dust somewhere in the region of the milky way. Beings possible of totally different orders of existence: constructed on a totally different pattern, linked to nature in a totally different way from ourselves, with powers and capacities by us undreamt of, all saved by the death of what to them would be a pygmy or a cheese-mite. Here was the fallacy of the earth being the center of the universe foisted by theologians into the spiritual order after being banished finally from the physical, just as physical cruelty after being slowly banished from material Christendom, found a last refuge in religion's Adullam, these tortured minds having lost its hold upon the body by imagining eternities of hell and torment after death. Or were we to suppose the Redeemer moving on from sphere to sphere, changing his form according to the creatures at the head of creation in each, and translated from one to the other by an infinite pro-

gression of crucifixions and martyrdoms? The idea was preposterous. And who believed this monstrous superstition? Only a small section of the human race for a brief period of two thousand years, a section that had borrowed this belief from the border land of western Asia because with their many excellent gifts of nature, they had no aptitude themselves for religious reflection. And just as the story of Antonio and Shylock in the Merchant of Venice had been borrowed from the legend of the Falcon and the Dove written or invented long before by the Author of the Mahabharata, so had the legends of Christianity been borrowed from the storehouses of Asiatic religious allegories that had been in vogue centuries before it saw the light. And just as the ancient Solar myths had clustered round the revered head of the sanctified Gautama, so his sayings and doings and the myths they had engendered had crystallized round the head of the legendary Christ. Was it a mere coincidence that he was of the Sakya tribe. Sakya meaning the Powers and that Christ was called the son of God:—God in Hebrew also meaning the Powers and further that Buddha's mother was said to be Maya, Illusion, just as Christ's was Mary according to the Gospel mythus. Again was it a mere coincidence that the temptation of Buddha by Mara the god of death or the Evil one ran through exactly the same phases as those of the Jewish Hadji. How thoroughly Indian again was the story of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Mary the Maya or Illusion and Mata matter the measurer—Prakriti the active female principle in Nature. Some of the parables again were manifest transcripts of Buddhist fables as was also the doctrine that one should love ones' enemies and be good to those who persecute one. Was it not singular, too, that Gautama, the father that is greater than I—of the Gospel legend—had prophesied of a Messiah whom he called Metteyu and who was destined to supplant or supplement his doctrine 500 years after his death that is to say just about the time of the birth of Christ? If there

were any truth in the story of the visit of the wise men from the east to the cradle of the infant Jesus, it does not require a great stretch of imagination to suppose that among the precious gifts were manuscripts from the east telling of these things and the perusal of which inspired the youthful Jesus to preach the doctrine of Buddhism of the Atman—the pearl of great price—the dew-drop—to his compatriots in Judæa. It is impossible to overlook another channel of information by which he may have become acquainted with knowledge of the primitive Aryan religious ideas—the Mishna or oral tradition of the Jews. That much of his doctrine was taken from it is certain. The Essenes we are told laid particular stress upon it and who were the Essenes? A sect of Jews whose tenets differed very slightly from those of Christians. Furthermore it would appear that some connection of a practical kind existed between these two parties of Jewish mystics. Not only was particular stress laid by both upon medicine and the importance of healing but their very name was the same if we accept De Quincey's derivation of Essenes (a word of doubtful origin as meaning 12 stones on the breastplate of the high priest). Again both the parties disappeared from Jewish history much about the same time that is shortly after the death of Christ. And finally how are we to account for the fact that while frequent mention is made by Josephus of the Essenes (he describes them in language that would very well apply to the early Christians) no mention at all is made of this latter sect except in one or two passages which are suspected to be interpolations? That the Christians should fight tooth and nail against the virtual identity of the two sects is only natural, for if Christ's miracles are legendary and much of his teaching derived from traditions held in common by Jewish sectaries, his originality and authority are thereby so much impaired that enough scarcely remains on which to found the claim that he is the second person of the Trinity who was gibbeted in an obscure corner of Asia Minor to appease

the anger of his Father, the creator of the starry Universe, and to save it and man who by his disobedience had brought down the wrath of the Father upon himself and also upon the illimitable starry Universe and all that lived and breathed within its pale.

But when Believers found the evidence of history and personal authority failing them, they appealed to fact, Look it was said at the great fact of the Christian Church:—Look at the noble types of Humanity it had produced. But this was only an ex parte view of the case. Look it might be replied at the great fact of Mahomedanism, of Hinduism, of Platonism. And if the past were ransacked and the present, too, it would be no difficult matter to produce as fine specimens of the human race from any of these sects as any that were due to the moulding of the muscles and expression by Christian superstition. Compare the natural healthy development of the Greek form and features, their divine repose, their simplicity, their perfect correlation, with nature, and the products of the Christian art of life, then the latter would be reckoned at its true value. Look at its spinsters with their pursed up mouths and their punchinello faces; look at the fishy opaque eye of the devout saint, look at the monkey-visaged fanatic clutching at his crucifix, look at the haggard browed Presbyterian with his restless insane eye, all these were the direct products of Christianity and its morbid cult. The spinster wore her bunched up comic mask, with its absurd nose and withered-apple-cheek pummels, because her mind that is her brain cells and those of her ancestors for centuries before her time had been perverted in the hopeless attempt to blend oil and vinegar, reason and nonsense, miracle and common sense. This gargoyle was carved by the hand of Christianity. So was the jowl of the fish-eyed devotee and the leathery wrinkles of the monkey visaged fanatic. So was the weathering crag—the menacing brow of the crazy Calvinist—strained like a man's who is struggling in a vain attempt to strap an overfull portmanteau.

Writhe and distort himself as he will, it is all in vain; he cannot fit the tongue of reason's buckle into the holes of pious orthodoxy punched at the other end of the slippery strip of cow-hide. How like were these wooden faced nonentities to a set of puppets being spun round in a Merry-go-round at a fair. And this forsooth was the one eternal Verity. And how about the millions of squandered lives of bodies rotting in hideous costumes, fetid horrible swarming forth on every Christian holiday. These were also the production of this precious infallible Social nostrum Christianity.

"Well, but", the Christian would reply with a mute appeal, with his sentimental tear-drop of treason to humanity quivering in his pug-dog eye, "what are you to put in the place of our divinely revealed religion and how have you the heart to steal from the masses their hope of a better life beyond the grave to compensate for the intolerable purgatory they have to endure at this side of it? If life is a desert even with belief what would it be without the comfort of the promises of Christianity." To this the answer is that Truth in the end brings greater consolation than even the most rosy coloured visions of religion. Moreover this very belief in a future life, where the wrongs of Lazarus shall be redressed and Dives shall be placed upon the gridiron, has much to answer for. This it is which has made comfortable society take the miseries of the poor so very philosophically. "True the poor devils have a bad time of it in this world" says heartless society's heartless religion (they are one and the same), but matters will be put straight for 'em in the next world. Abraham's bosom you know and all that sort of thing. Have a cigarette?" Do away with the hideous creed and you do away with one of the main supports of society's hideous card house of selfishness and indifference.

Again those who labour and are heavy laden will always have their heaven to look forward to, however negative belief may become because the hard day's labour

brings a night of repose which is itself a glimpse of heaven and will not seem to the imagination of the toiler less heavenly because at the end of life's day's work it is prolonged throughout eternity. And it is for these disinherited ones, the suffering masses that our sentimental Christian is supposed to appeal. Again the wealthy and leisured classes need very little commiseration; partly for the same, partly for a different reason. They have it in their power to make life so full of excitement of adventure and of useful toil that the repose at the end of it all ought not to terrify them, while those who squander their time in idleness and selfish pleasures, have no right to complain because their earthly joys are not destined to be prolonged throughout eternity. It is the great middle class who are perhaps most to be commiserated; they are bound hand and foot to a life of drudgery with just enough leisure in it to let them perceive the emptiness and futility of it all.

But it is to be remembered that as a body they are responsible for the bog in which they flounder, it is the mania for respectability, for getting on, for trampling their fellow creatures under their feet, for soaring at last as cocks of the dunghill, that has turned them into arid galley slaves and after all most of them are so preoccupied by the cares and delights of money making, so deaf to everything save the sound of the muck rake in their gambling hells, that life passes with only a twinge or two now and then of blank horror at the thought of what may or may not be in store for them at the end of it. There is another side to this decay of definite belief which is at the same time both tragical and comical. The paid officials of religion naturally endeavour to persuade the world that the loss of religious belief falls like a stunning, blow upon the individual consciousness. This might be an argument in favour of the creeds if it were at all generally true, but as a matter of fact it is not. Religious minded people cast their faiths quite as easily as a healthy silkworm casts its skin, and feel just as

comfortable after the process is undergone as they were before it began. The reason of this is not difficult to see. In proportion as the mind is freed from the warping, wrenching effect of superstition and regains its natural elasticity, it emerges from the gloom of the artificial and is brought into line with nature whose eternal repose, and eternal activity are the best balm and consolation of a sick soul. I remember how when the evidence for the negative truth proved irresistible I said to myself "It is good even to obey the night" and accepted it resignedly and without equivocation and did not find anything so very dreadful after all in the renunciation of artificial faith and fiction. It was a glorious evening in a mild December. I strolled along the flat Eastern counties' road until I came to a bridge over a railway. It was Sunday. No trains were running. Opposite me was a large undulating stubble field—a sort of low chalk down with an old fashioned mill at the top of it also motionless. Not a breath of air stirred the vanes nor the top of the feathering Scotch firs which stood near it in a loose group. How every leaf, every shrub, every contour of the country harmonized, blended in the carnelian of the sunset, as the dendrites of a moss agate swim together in the crystal-clear haze of the chalcedony. The sun had just set behind the mill but the mild saffron light lingered in the west and flamed into beryl where a few bands of purple cloud hung suspended like strands of russet seaweed at the slack tide marking where the line of reefs run out to sea, and as they hung suspended in that glory of the firmament charged almost imperceptibly, moved inwardly by the slowly drifting current of the night. Eastward to my left the sky was covered with loose cottony clouds of a pale dove colour twisted by the upper current of air into various scrolls and ringlets in a Pre-Raphaelite picture, others deep down in the depths of the cloud canopy, but all so loosely interwoven that they served rather to intensify than conceal the peculiar blue of the interjacent lakes of ether, a blue

different from anything ever seen before or since, an intense cobalt with a kind of chalky bloom upon it like the bloom upon a plum or peach. Not the faintest touch of discord marred the perfect picture. Not a line awry jarred with its symmetry and then the vision slowly faded; withdrawn transfigured not destroyed. And that is all I said to myself. A few brief years and then we go and are as though we never had been. What matter? A sea of tears seemed to fill my breast. And then I looked again at the slowly fading, glimmering landscape, at the beauty of its divinity half evanishing into the night. What power and calm repose and glory and tranquility was there. "What matters it", I said within myself, what becomes of this inner self, this wretched personality, with its lust for an exclusive heaven wherein it may figure a discrete and isolated small and fussy godhead with its dogmas and its creeds, and its peg-top cherubims humming to the harping of patent archangels volalitized there from the last welsh eisteddfod? Is there no faith in nature? Is not the glory of its apparition the higher revelation? Is not resignation to its inevitable processes the higher cult? Or rather not resignation for whether we resign or not makes no difference—what will be will be—but rather cheerful and contented life as part and parcel of nature's sublime existence—as an exfoliation of her agate being—the one being that has no beginning and no end. All at once as if by an inspiration from without, the tearful agony within seemed to be dissipated or rather transformed into a kind of passive contentment in which pleasure was more apparent than suffering. And this is the truth, I said to myself with a deep sigh of relief, and all the rest was but a hideous night-mare—the eruptions of an ape's brain. All the seething hells and the tootling heavens all the dust and filth of apery, as it capers on its kjökken-midden, projected into the skyey splendours, as it projects its halfmunched mash of nuts and apples from its cheek-pouches onto anything that displeases it—it was all a folly and a delusion. All its

dogmas and its creeds, the grotesques and arabesques of its too nimble fancy, of its discursive brain-work—they were transient-earthborn—the shadows of it danse-macabre. And oh blessed thought, all the horrors of its social state, the forms into which its no-belief had crystallized were also lies, the efflorescence of its apish spite and its apish animalism. These and the man-ape's alter ego—his weather-cock—God forged of the dross of what he called his own moral nature, the scare-crow boguëy of a divinity botched out of the rag heap of his own ape's brain it was but part and parcel of the litter and dust of his own earth-born existence—his howlings and his canticles but a faint echo of the long ago religion of the tree-tops. What was his accursed human justice, too, but an ingenious device for flattering his own vanity and at the same time slaking the man-apes ferocious lust of blood and cruelty that gnawed his vitals. What a hateful farce it all was the disgusting little man-apes with their puckered sallow faces, mannikins muffled up in their robes and driving in solemn procession to their law-court shambles where they joked and chuckled at the juggling tricks they played there with the great mystery of life they could destroy so easily and were so powerless to create. And then their loathsome Tyburns and Golgatha's so dear to the human heart for they reminded him of the ancestral Man-Gorilla's gibbet-larder some jutting branch in the primeval forest in which he hung the reeking riven carcass of his victim. And lastly society's sickening externalization of religion—its little button of an aristocracy of luxury—its earth-god-grotesque parody of its moral fetish-bobbing like dyspeptic Bishop Lauds horse-hair wig above a weltering sea of rags and vice and misery. To conform to every established lie, to bow the knee to every hideous Baal of etiquette and usage and custom—that was the Gospel of society—and oh! Glorious reanimating thought! it was so not because it was true in itself, but because it was the product, the output so to say of the developed

ape-brains working in collusion, of which units society was composed. Society decreed that its items should conform to its narrow laws that every one should follow the vices and follies of his neighbour not in virtue of any heaven-sent mandate, but because the whole system rested upon the sandy foundation of imitation; and it did so rest because human beings were only developed apes and mimicry and imitation were the apes especial mental characteristics. Here was the root of the dualism:—of the kinkings and harlings that made of human society nothing but a tangled skein of vice and misery. And the remedy?

To put away the animal—the man-ape nature to bury the dogma of its infallibility in the dust of ages—to cease the eternal hammer, hammer along the a priori road—never again to be emmeshed in the cobwebs of religious twaddle because the ape-brain spun them—but to sweep away all the scurf of its imaginings to get rid of the artificial dualism of human society and to stand face to face with the illusive but inevitable because natural dualism of terrestrial life in its bare simplicity, to set the affections on things above not on things of the ape, here was the one road of salvation from the earth ape's earthiness, his religious frenzy, his judicial butcheries, and all the categories of his self-inflicted martyrdoms. What in the glorious light of this transfigured negativism did it matter what became of my own wretched personality sputtering and fuming in its socket existence behind its ape-mask. To be translated from the dust and dim and chatter of the worlds mart into the calm serenity of the inorganic world at the end of life's day—even though as concerned consciousness and personality that meant that all eternity should be one long night — oh! that was heaven enough for me at the end of life, to perceive at last that all the mouthings and foamings, the dogmas and anathemas of the man-ape were but sound and fury signifying nothing, oh! that was paradise enough while still the earth planet was my

home. For the night of blood and superstition would never come to an end. The human beast would never learn that Love and Pity are the only life and the Law of Mercy the only Justice. Some Shakespeare by the alchemy of his genius might stir the huge inert boulder of human brutality and indifference a hand's breadth nearer the edge of the precipice, and centuries after him some Tennyson, but sooner or later it would roll back into its former resting place; it would never topple over into the abyss.

My thoughts took another turn. Like a sweet chord of resonance to my renunciation the voice of nature, of great Pan spoke within me and his words were balm and healing. "Be the child of the All and not of the Ape" they seemed to say, "and the Child-life will be yours once more, the glorious majesty of the old world deities will again be unveiled, and in this resurrection of the spirit there will be no God and no immortality because all is immortal and divine." I felt within me that the words were true. And then it occurred to me that in disentangling the harlings and kinkings of the brutal ape-society and its bestial Christianity and in standing face to face with the one illusive dualism of nature, humanity would perhaps find its true self-like the magic of a star in still water—the atman—pale reflexion of the Parathman of Vedic intuition—the dew-drop, the silver thread of individuality, the streamlet of the child-life running deep down among its fern-glades and acanthus leaves, the pearl of great price that the northern gibbons stamped under their feet, the priceless jewel, the talisman, not revealed supernaturally, by the Jew's stone God to the Christian's Man-God, but brought by the wise men in their casket from the eastern world of mystery, to the western shores of Asia, the most priceless pearl of Orient. What passion, what delight lay hid in the adoration of the mystic oneness, this pearl of individuality set in the crown of freedom, enthroned upon a heaven of Mercy and Forgiveness this dewdrop of Nirvana

trembling on the lotus petal of existence. Such passion and such delight as stirred those time-worn Magi as they contemplated its pale counterfeit in the babe-being they did not disdain to bow before and worship. We of to-day are the inheritors of a more stupendous vision. For we see the Atman the Ego in every form of organic life, identical in kind though not in degree in the feeblest and the mightiest of earth's creation. The same in the man and in the brute, glimmering in the film of life that gathers upon cooling planets, like the beryl flame in the strand of sunset cloud. In plant and animal it twinkles for a brief instant like one twinkle of Sirius in a frosty night and then is withdrawn for ever, lost in some impersonal inconceivable mode of existence or non-existence. The religion of difference was at an end. That of identity had just begun. Truly man being in honour had no understanding but was like unto the beasts that perish. But enrolled among them, crowned with humility, his consciousness his Ego put on a semblance of objective reality from the very extent and oneness of its manifestation. A faint flicker of departing day danced up and down the wall in a blotch or two of yellow light reflected doubtless from the windows on the opposite side of the street and then faded away or melted into a kind of honey coloured stain. And now having thought my way to something like definite belief, if I wished to proselytize and bring readers to my own way of thinking I ought to be able to say that I rested perfectly content and happy in it. But as I am essaying the humbler task of writing physical truth and not religious fiction I say nothing of the sort. On the contrary, whether the brain cells were irritated by the long sea-sawing of conflicting sentiments and reasoning or whether some other cause was at work I do not venture to conjecture—suffice it to say that in the glowering twilight a feeling of utter hopelessness, despair and misery weighed upon me, crushed me, wrung the life out of me; a feeling like that which tortures clairvoyant

and sensitive minds, when the madmen who rule the political world, by the adroit manipulation of circumstance or by the mere brutal exercise of their godless power bring about some frightful political crime or judicial horror to sicken humanity at large and to glut their own insane desires. I seemed to be staring away in infinites of time at the dead corpse of nature; and the glorious dome of heaven with its countless multitudes of stars shrank and dwindled till at last it was only a cracked chalice with scurf and dust and a few rusty nails at the bottom of it. Far away I seemed to hear as if in a dream the children dancing up and down the stairs not now like motes in the sunlight but like creaking marionettes and chanting their perpetual refrain:—"Little Nellie Distin! Little Nellie Distin!" Our life is a plough. The ploughshare is the present. The horses are the future. They seem to urge it onward:—but behind stands the ploughman of our past lives fashions determines the furrow along which they are to go. Only with our lives, the ploughman of the past grows and grows and the horses and the ploughshare dwindle and dwindle and then—And then—But stay we are now on the threshold of the event which is only itself a prelude to the Climax of the story if indeed it is not the climax itself seen from an inward esoteric point of view. However this may be, here let us draw rein and leave the narration of the Event to the following chapter.

NOTE ON THE ESSENES

Bishop Lightfoot in his notes and commentaries on the Epistle to the Colossians has treated of the Essenes with an immense display of learning. Briefly stated, the known facts about the Essenes are as follows:—According to Pliny they were a sect of considerable antiquity having their head quarters somewhere to the East of the Jordan near the Dead Sea. They were ascetic celibates, strict Sabbatarians and very careful to wash their hands before meals. Their doctrine or at least their Ethic closely

corresponded with that taught by Buddha and at a later period by Christ. It is doubtful whether they are alluded to in the Talmud. The derivation of their name is also considered doubtful. Many learned guesses of a very far fetched character are cited by the learned Bishop with less or more approval. As to the origin of the sect several theories have been advanced. One learned German believes them to be simply a strict and exclusive sect of Pharisees, while Zeller derives their peculiar discipline from Pythagoras. Bishop Lightfoot shows that Grecian influence did not find its way to Judaea until a time when Pythagoreanism was practically extinct in Greece, he ascribes the peculiar tenets and organisation to Persian and especially Magian influence. Many learned writers trace the origin of the sect to Buddhism. There is a resemblance between the Ethics of Buddhism that of the Essenes and the Christianity of Christ. Moreover like the Buddhists the Essenes were divided into four orders according to their states of spiritual enlightenment. Bishop Lightfoot attempts to disprove any connection between Buddhism and Essene doctrine. But this attempt is not very successful and is probably due to Christian bias. For if Christ turns out to have borrowed most of his Ethic from India what becomes of his claim to be an inspired God, revealing truths direct from heaven and working miracles.

Bishop Lightfoot successfully and with much learning proves that Greece and Rome knew very little about Buddha and his works:—but he does not shew that the Persians knew nothing of his teaching and what has the ignorance of Greece and Rome in the matter to do with a sect of Jews situated to the East of the Jordan and no doubt in communication with Persia and perhaps with Hindustan?

The next half of the Essay is an attempt to disprove any connection between Christ and the Essenes. Here the influence of Christian bias becomes still more marked and the arguments more far fetched and unsatisfactory.

De Quincey in the remarkable essay alluded to above points out the extraordinary fact that while Josephus and Philo give a full and detailed account of the Essenes no mention is made of the Christians except in a single passage in Josephus which is now admitted on all hands to be an interpolation. At the same time the description given by Josephus of the Essenes, would apply equally well to the Christian twelve with one or two exceptions as for example their sabbatarianism, lustrations and strict asceticism. Bishop Lightfoot carefully omits to mention De Quincey's derivation of the name Essene from Essen—a name referring to the 12 stones on the high priests breast-plate, which would at once identify the Christian twelve with the Essenes and he also ignores the crux of the difficulty which the logical genius of De Quincey seized at once:—I mean the absence of all mention of the Christians in the writings of Josephus while the Essenes are treated of copiously in terms that would in the main apply to the twelve of Christ:—and lastly there is the fact remarkable when taken in connection with the above, that while we hear plenty about the Pharisees and Saducees in the sacred narrative, no mention is made of the third of the three important Jewish sects—that namely of the Essenes. The inference is difficult to evade for anyone but a partisan. The Essenes are not mentioned in the gospel narrative, because the twelve were a part of them. Unless indeed De Quincey's derivation is correct in which case the mention of the twelve in the gospel story *is* a mention of the Essenes. De Quincey's acute mind was quick to perceive what a blow to the authority of Christ as an inspired God it would be if it could be shown that he was simply the reformer of a previously existing sect of Jews from which he had derived most of his doctrine and ethics:—at the same time the famous essayist's logical training forced him to accept the fact of the identity of Essenes and Christians while he was or fancied himself an ardent believer in revelation. What was to be done under the circumstances?

Only one course was possible and he took it. He denied the Existence of the Essenes as a previous sect and invented a theory that the Christians resolved themselves into a secret society under the name of Essenes in order to escape the persecution of the Sanhedrim. This theory is untenable but it does not invalidate the force of De Quincey's arguments in favour of the identity of Christians and Essenes. The learned Bishop however lumps all together and dismisses the author with an Episcopal pat on the back as follows:—"De Quincey has approached the question in a very different spirit (i. e. from those horrid German sceptics Grätz, Gensing and others) but his theories are not worthy of serious refutation. In this way budding "Spiritual ones" are guided by the hand of Theological Candour and prevented from reading for themselves several awkward pieces of criticism stigmatized as not worthy of serious refutation.

Bishop Lightfoot then goes on to demolish the theory of a connection between Christians and Essenes in his own way. It is an amazing way. But then Theology is an amazing "science". He first assumes that the connection if any between Christ and the Essenes must have been through John the Baptist or James the Brother of Jesus, and then endeavours with more or less success to show that these persons were not Essenes—or at any rate not very much so. After this he devotes a few pages to magnifying the points of difference and minimizing those of resemblance between the Christians and the Essenes and then concludes the Essay. Anyone who has studied with care the authoritative Panagesis Josephus, and read De Quincey's Essay as well as Dr. Lightfoot's with an unbiassed mind will I think be obliged to come to a different conclusion and agree with De Quincey that there was a close connection between the Essenes and Christ. I would suggest that the connection may have been somewhat as follows:—The Essenes were an ascetic order of Jewish gnostics or eclectics situated to the East of the Jordan, versed in divination and the

study of the stars and in touch with Persian Magian and Buddhist mysticism. These wise men from the East then or some of their Magi friends it was who saw Christ's star in the East and came and worshipped him. Among the spices and jewels which they brought to the infant Christ were Buddhist and Magian manuscripts which he studied and on which he founded his system and modelled his life. How appropriate, if this was so, a present of jewels from a sect whose name was taken from the 12 precious stones on the High-Priests breast-plate. How appropriate again Christ's parable of the pearl of great price he had read of, the dew-drop of Indian mysticism, the Atman destined to be reabsorbed at last in the Paratman or Universal soul. If again Christ and the twelve were a sub-sect of reforming Essenes who taught a return to the simplicity of primitive Buddhist doctrine, this would explain the differences between the Christian and the more rigid Essenes discipline—the Christian rejection of Sabbatharianism—for Buddhism knew no Sabbath-God and kept hardly any festivals:—the Christian rejection of extreme Asceticism,—for primitive Buddhism expressly enjoined a moderate enjoyment of the good things of this life—the Christian rejection of ceremonial ablutions before meals, connected with ideas of caste (the four orders or castes of the Essenes sect might not even touch one another lest they should become unclean)—for Buddhism taught the brotherhood of all men and nothing was common or unclean. Here, too, might perhaps be found a clue to the explanation of the remarkable coincidences between the legendary events in the life of Christ—Metteyu—and those of the primitive Buddha.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE THRESHOLD

My readers are probably aware that there is a plant the seeds of which are much affected by cage-birds, a plant which—grown in certain countries and prepared

in certain ways—possesses properties of a character which may not unfitly be described as magical. I allude to the famous cannabis indica or gunjah. Unlike opium the effects of this drug even if taken in excess though terrific as to the bodily and mental torments they can produce are never or scarcely ever fatal while used in moderation, and occasionally the preparations of hemp are admirable remedies in cases of disordered stomach, producing healthy appetite, perfect digestion and a sense of contentment which generally lasts for several days after a single mild dose. For cases of dipsomania they are also said to be a certain cure partly indirectly by restoring the diseased digestion partly because the transports of bliss they can set in motion, altogether eclipse the grosser raptures of the toper's paradise and render his spirit-drinking debauches flat and insipid. Many distinguished literary men have put on record the effect produced upon themselves by eating gunjah—among whom I may mention the well-known French writer Theophile Gautier. It varies in different individuals, still more it may be conjectured with the state of the weather, and lastly perhaps according to the ingredients with which the drug is mixed. Some writers describe the splendid visions of external nature, the glorious, unearthly sunsets, the revelations of the starry sphere of which they are entranced spectators, others the more than heavenly delight, the exquisite sensations of bliss which even a simple melody gives them while under the magic influence of the drug. To others again it appears that they are split up into two or more existences who keep up a perpetual banter full of fun and frolic among themselves, some of them being of a waggish character, others staid and serious, sometimes again the patient feels himself to be wholly disembodied, wholly freed from the pains and pleasures of earthly existence, he sees his body lying on the couch below him, while he himself is attached to matter in a subtler manner and lives as it were in a different plane of being. An accident had made me

acquainted with some of the milder effects of the drug. A friend, who was a great sufferer from asthma, smoked cigarettes of cannabis indica and gave me two to try. The mental effect upon himself was nil. They were only a mild palliative of the malady from which he suffered. Indeed they were of no great size and the amount of the drug which could have been absorbed by the system of anyone smoking them must have been infinitesimal. I took them home and determined to smoke them in the evening instead of my ordinary tabacco. But in a very few minutes, if it is permitted to speak of time in this connection, I had discovered how differently the same thing affects the minds of different individuals. I shall not attempt to describe the state of consciousness evolved. It was partly agreeable but in the main horrible. Whole ages seemed to elapse—marred by a constantly recurring sense of discord—and the dread of some impending catastrophe of a terrific sort. Then there was the spectacle of bloodshed vaguely here and there and a great horror of death, destined but too surely to close all in a very brief space of time, a horror out of all proportion to what reason and morality tells us it is right to feel, a horror such as the wicked brutality of the Christians' inhuman laws, because human made, imposes in defiance of all justice and right reason—upon the wretch condemned in cold blood by wretches more villainous than himself to expiate his crime by the application of hemp in another fashion, after a long period of mental torture, compared with which the most frightful of the barbarities inflicted upon the body by the Spanish Inquisition, appear in the mild light of mercy and loving kindness.

I say I shall not attempt to describe the indescribable. No murderer rescued at the last moment from the fell butcher of the Christian law has ever described what he underwent, because memory is incapable of bearing the burden of horror, which evaporated the very consciousness as we know it into a different state of being, impossible to be strung upon the thread of commonplace

recollection. It is this impossibility of the ordinary memory to reproduce or even in any real sense to realize the fact of such past horrors of consciousness that makes it a perfectly psychical possibility that a murderer or an innocent man rescued in the last moment from the gallows, should after the lapse of a few weeks go and commit another murder, or if he were innocent be prompted to do what otherwise would have been quite alien from his character. For the ravishing reprieve entranced out of all due proportion by the previous horror would be a perpetual legacy of the recollection, while the horror itself, as I have explained above, would from its very intensity lapse altogether into oblivion, or perhaps even be mildly embellished, in the afterglow of the succeeding reprieve. Surely this is the very reduction ad absurdum of capital punishment. To resume:—It may indeed appear incredible that after the horrors I had undergone under the influence of bhang, I should ever again have braved its terrors, but the psychological principle enunciated above is applicable also in my own case. The horror was felt in a state of being which ordinary memory was incapable of reproducing:—while the excellent appetite, the perfect digestion, and the sense of bien aise which lasted for a week or more afterwards were very vividly realised, and completely threw into the back-ground the distress experienced for a few hours although in a *formal* but not in a *real* way memory fully recognised that those few hours had been protracted into apparent eternities of anguish and misery. But brain, reason, as we have it evolved by Nature, for the use of animals under a dispensation of time and space kept continually whispering to consciousness that after all it had been *really* only a few hours, till consciousness at last forgot how real the eternity had been to her. And thus it happens that on several occasions when semi-starvation or other causes have provoked digestive derangements, I had recourse to cannabis indica cigarettes and have generally found in them an efficient, always a

perfectly harmless remedy. But on these occasions I have used the utmost caution, seldom smoking more than an inch and a half of a thin cigarette not so much from a belief that a larger dose would be injurious, as because with me the immediate effect of the drug is far more unpleasant than agreeable. The few experiments I have made with it, however, have led me to conclude that the pleasant or unpleasant effects, depend first upon the person who takes it and secondly upon the circumstances under which he takes it and in these I include the taste agreeable or otherwise of the balsams with which the drug is mixed when eaten as *gunjah*:—for as we have seen in the case of music, a very simple melody will cause raptures of delight, so an agreeable taste in the mouth or the reverse, will cause raptures of delight or horror to a person under the influence of the Indian hemp. Thus again on the same principle taken on a gloomy inclement day, *cannabis indica* will cause unpleasant effects, taken in presence of a glorious summer sunrise, agreeable ones:—taken by a pessimist, the feelings will be horrible, taken by an optimist, heavenly. Again if the first dose has been taken under depressing influences subsequent doses will most likely produce unfavourable effects, for every time the *cannabis indica* state is induced, it brings back the recollection of previous ones:—in order to render the experiences agreeable it would be necessary to take the drug only at times when the sensuous surroundings are agreeable and the mind in a state of happy equipoise. For in point of fact the effect of the drug does not seem to resemble that of opium or spirits. what it does is to enhance the inner vitality during its period of action and to place the mind by doing so in more intimate union with its surroundings. If the mind of the person acted upon is prone to melancholy and pessimism the drug intensifies its pessimistic vitality, if the surroundings are gloomy it intensifies the gloomy interaction between the mind and its surroundings, with happy natures and in happy surroundings

delight predominates, in opposite circumstances, horror. Place a melancholy mind in an elysium of sensuous delights, of sound and sight and feeling, and it is difficult to say what would be the result of a dose of hemp, possibly a complete restoration to the conviction that life is well worth living. However this may be, at the particular period I am writing of I did not find it necessary to employ the drug. The well-known thrill by which it heralds its speedy action (for the effect it produces is almost immediate) belonged to a different period of my life. For a long time I had had no occasion to use it. I was in a state of excellent health, neither stomach nor brain suffered from any trouble whatever. Judge then of my astonishment—but astonishment is a weak word—my frenzy of excitement I had almost said, when in the course of my lubrications indicated by the two words “and then” of the previous chapter, I felt the first unmistakable thrills—unlike anything else in nature—of the Magic Indian weed.

It is important for the right understanding of what follows that the reader should fully realize the impossibility of my having inadvertently either smoked or swallowed any of the *cannabis indica*. In the present instance, whatever explanation there may be of the mysterious events I have to record, whatever theory he may be inclined to adopt to account for these when he reaches the end of the narrative, must exclude any such assumption which would be wholly at variance with fact. I possessed no *cannabis indica* in any form and had not smoked either before or after lunch. Collusion of any sort was quite out of the question. Several hours had elapsed since my midday meal, and to suppose that anyone could have drugged the viands was to suppose what was not only improbable but impossible. Let alone the fact that the effects of the drug would have manifested themselves much sooner, my lunch had been of the very simplest description, consisting of some cold tongue I had eaten part of at breakfast, some bread and butter and

a little cheese and between the two meals I had not left the room. The cause of the mysterious thrill was therefore utterly beyond my comprehension to unravel. But to say that I thought or felt at all is to give a wrong impression of what occurred. Rather the astonishment and frenzy of excitement blended with the new state of being and created a tempest of life totally unlike anything experienced before or since:—not the long and surging waves of thought where everything is lost at last in terror and horror but world upon world, system after system circling in and out in one sublime harmony of which in some mysterious way my inmost being seemed to be the soul resting in perfect repose, though itself the cause of all those stupendous activities. All the actual material surroundings in which I was placed had vanished from consciousness æons and æons before, even the systems of our constellations were undistinguishable in the rush and throb of being which formed the outer covering of my new existence, but at last the cataract of suns and stars seemed to diminish and I saw the ellipses of the planets that circle round our own sun, all at once everything dwindled, grew chilly, expired, vanished in the night-air and lo! I was in the elliptical stair-case in the old home, clasping a bit of rag with harsh crape-like crimson stains upon it and cowering by the side of the green metallic stove, scaly with use and emitting its familiar smell of rusty iron. And the old feeling of hopeless misery for the vanished child life of the past and for the infant brother lost with that child life came back again:—I crept out from behind the stove and looked through the drawing room window out into the warm summer afternoon. Yes there it was as doubtless it had been all the time, hanging in a sky now purple and star-inwoven the huge moonlike planet with its smaller revolving moons. I gazed on and on till my eyes fixed themselves in one eternal stare and the walls of the room and the trees outside and the grass plot of the garden began to sway and fluctuate, until at last I ceased to

perceive them at all. I remember once when playing a game of chess, the thought occurred to me how gruesome it would be if the pieces of the chess-board were suddenly to show a flickering pulse of life, were then to root themselves to the squares and refuse to move, afterwards were gradually to undulate to and fro and at last collapse into a tabid mass of white ivory-looking corruption, but soft and malleable like glue. Something of the same kind occurred to me on the present occasion. Everything seemed to undulate to and fro and to be collapsing into a tabid mass, only the moonlike planet with the lesser revolving moons grew and grew, until they seemed almost to cover the whole of the night heaven. And now, if I were writing a scientific romance in the manner of Jules Verne, I ought to describe how I came within the sphere of influence of the planet and its revolving moons, how first I circled round one of the moons and then round another and finally dropped down upon the surface of the planet itself. There is only one objection fatal as it seems to me to writing in this style on the present occasion, this namely that as a matter of fact nothing of this kind did actually happen. On the contrary, the white discs of the planet and its moons seemed to continue to expand until they occupied almost the whole of the visible heaven. They then coalesced much as drops of quicksilver run together and occupied it all. At that instant I felt an extraordinary tremor of delight and agony and suddenly became aware that my body was now formless, but consisted of a substance of infinite extension and possessing the two opposite properties of perfect hardness and perpetual softness at the same time. Almost instantaneously after this the most intense blueness prevailed everywhere, flashing out with a brightness above that of an ocean of sapphire, flaming forth everywhere like the intense crimson and green streaks of the aurora, only of the deepest most pellucid blue:—then all at once I drew a deep sigh and found myself standing once more upon terra firma. Oh! how

thankful I was to find myself on the lap of mother earth again, the mother of all that we know and of all that we feel after that hideous nightmare of the imagination. It was only after a long pause of thankful relief that I began to look about me:—and then it occurred to me that the region I was in was wholly unknown to me and to wonder how I could have got there. All around was an immense plateau of a mountainous character, consisting mainly of rock and sand which toward the horizon seemed to trend away and subside into the plain. Here and there in the distance were what appeared to be scattered trees but of what kind I was too far off to tell, they did not seem to resemble anything I had ever seen before. What was most striking was the extremely barren nature of the district I was in:—but it was already drawing towards evening and perhaps the country on that account looked more wasted than it really was. One thing however struck me as strange:—that although it was still light and there was not a cloud to be seen anywhere, no sun was visible but in the west burnt an intensely blue colour throwing out occasional flashes of an equally intense white hue. I suppose it is the after-glow, I said to myself, but I never saw it so bright as it is this evening. All at once the explanation of the whole mystery flashed into my mind. I had been the victim of one of those extraordinary but not extremely uncommon seizures known as states of double consciousness. It is on record that people have suddenly lapsed from their normal into a second state of consciousness which has lasted eight or ten days. During this second state of consciousness a sedentary person who seldom or never moved from his native town has been known to travel several hundred miles, and waking at the end of his wandering out of his second into his normal state of consciousness, to be amazingly perplexed to know how he had got into the new surroundings among which he found himself. This I all at once realized was what must have happened to myself on the present occasion. I then

remembered that a few days before the trance-like seizure described in the present chapter I had fallen into a brown study one evening and experienced an intense longing to explore some of the wild districts in the extreme north of Scotland. This explained it all. The barrenness of the country, the extreme brilliance of the afterglow and those other atmospheric effects which were perhaps of a magnetic character. "At any rate I must try and find some sort of shelter for the night, I said to myself, it will soon begin to draw in cold." So saying I hurried on in hopes of finding some path or cart track, which would bring me to any kind of habitation human or other. The sun in the west still continued to throw up bright white streamers such as I remembered once to have seen in Sicily when travelling by diligence very early in the morning from Santa Theresa along the road to the ruins of Selinunto. I walked on and on under a sky which was not blue but of a pale coppery fawn colour, without seeing a trace of any kind of life, and instead of freshening at every step I took the evening became more oppressive and stifling. I found myself gasping for breath and was obliged to sit down on a large rounded stone to gather strength to proceed. At last I came to a place where the plateau sloped downward a little and far away in the distance I saw something resembling a clump of trees. I made the best of my way towards them, but when I came nearer to them and saw what they were, my heart sank within me and I felt a secret qualm of dismay, for they completely negatived the theory I had formed that I was in the north of Scotland. My state of double consciousness must have lasted an unexampled length of time, and while I was in it, I must have actually travelled beyond the confines of Europe:—for the trees I was now looking at were not Scotch firs—as I had supposed at first—but a group of unhealthy looking palm trees unlike any I had ever seen depicted in any book of travels or natural history, but unmistakeably palms belonging to a tropical or semi-tropical climate.

Among them were other trees which I took to be the desiccated flowering stems of the aloe, but whose true nature will be explained further on. I need not say what dismay and misery seized upon me, and not only dismay but a feeling of blind rage and indignation, for I got it into my head that the state of double consciousness must have been the result of some mesmeric trick, or spiritual hocus-pocus practised upon me. My thoughts at once reverted to the mysterious Hindu I had seen on the Monday morning of my sacrifice to Siva. He was the hateful spiritual juggler, the detestable mystic that was responsible for it. I could see him in imagination squatting in his lair near upper Rathbone Place with his hateful mystical Indian leer upon his vile phiz, as he sat cross-legged, bowing his head and absorbed over his fan-painting. A perfect frenzy of hatred possessed me. I felt if I could have got at him, I would have throttled him with my own hands. I seized a large, pointed stone and flung it at one of the palm trees exclaiming:—"Take that (you) malignant wretch." Then I burst out into a perfect roar of execrations and despair. Little by little my rage subsided. One or two thoughts of a more consolatory kind reassured me. If my theory was correct, I could not be so very far from civilized human beings, for I could not have wandered very far away from the possibility of obtaining food while in my state of double consciousness. Fortified by this conviction, I continued to make my way over the rock and sand, when in the gathering obscurity I observed on the ground something that partly reassured partly terrified me afresh. This was the print of three enormous feet, if I was not deceived by the darkness, of some gigantic bird: they formed a kind of triangle on the ground, I only saw those three and tried in vain to prick out the creatures slot. But now my vital forces and endurance all at once completely collapsed, with every step I took the evening air had grown sultrier, warmer, and more vitiated, until at last I could breathe it no longer, but after vainly gasping and

catching my breath, stumbled, toppled over and fell into a kind of swoon. As I did so a voice whispered in my mental ear:—"Something very dreadful has happened to you, the most dreadful thing that can possibly happen to any human being", and then I know not what organ or vessel snapped inside with a dismal twang that sounded like the wail of a sea-bird on a barren coast, and I said to myself:—"Oh yes, I always knew it would be like that." This swoon however was of very brief duration:—nature brought me out of it by the simplest and most natural of remedies—the dewfall. But it was a perfect deluge of dew that fell. It sparkled on the flat rocks and ran trickling down the sloping ones in little rivulets of silver. I was soaked through and through, but thank heaven's the stifling heat and sultriness was over, the night air was still warm but also deliciously balmy and reinvigorating. I sat up and looked about. On one side was the last faint glimmer of the sunset like an azure stain upon the darkness, on the other was a wan flush of light that betokened the approaching moonrise. "So," I said to myself, "for centuries and centuries have doubtless the Nomads of these steppes, as they drove their flocks over them, awaited the rising of the friendly moon to light them on their way. How many vague desires and yearning aspirations has the wan light of the wanderer up above engendered in the dim half-lighted brain of the Nomad of the steppes—the moon with its countless flock of stars, the shepherd with his ewes and lambs wandering to find a scanty nourishment over the illimitable tundras of Northern Asia. What melancholy fancies of the nothingness of life, of the transitoriness of all earthly things it has set in motion as its suffused light-rain beat down from the eaves of some pendant cloud, upon the bony wedge of a horse's skull or the snake-like vertebra of some mouldering human skeleton half-buried in the drifting sand." So I mused, when all at once a hush of intense awe and expectation fell upon me, the prescience of some coming catastrophe, and words again formed

themselves in my brain:—"That dreadful thing is now about to be realized." I looked defiantly towards the west, and defiantly my own heart answered:—"no, it shall not be:—everything everywhere is in the natural deep repose of a summer evening. Beyond the loneliness there is nothing to cause me the slightest apprehension." With a sense of deep thankfulness and relief I looked towards the western horizon where the moon was just rising behind a stony hump or hillock with one gibbet-like aloestalk growing on one side of it. Yes it was the moon nearly at the full rising as it always did, swimming upward through a sea of vapours:—first the upper limb appeared above the horizon: gradually, slowly, steadily, the whole of the disc emerged to view. I drew a deep breath of satisfaction. Yes, there it was, our old moon, Mata, the measurer, hanging in the eastern sky and looking just as she always looked. Only owing to the extreme dryness of the atmosphere perhaps she looked a little smaller than usual and I failed to trace upon her surface the peculiar mottlings which have received so many fanciful interpretations from popular superstition. A slight shadow of uneasiness fell upon my mind, which was gradually deepening into a vague apprehension of I know not what, when suddenly, as if by a lightening flash of some desolating revelation, all my comfortable optimism was shattered in an instant, and I sank back with a howl of immeasurable anguish into an abyss of spiritual despair. The moon was now swimming in the heavens a degree or so above it, but the light along the horizon did not diminish. On the contrary, at a spot to the west of the risen moon the glimmer intensified, grew and grew, until, catching my breath and with a sense of unspeakable horror clinging about my heart-strings, I perceived a second moon, larger than the first, slowly emerging above the horizon and rising like a silvery bubble through the sea of purple haze. For a moment everything seemed to be giving way under and within me:—then I tried to recover myself and to take courage.

After all, I said, it is a very common phenomenon—it is one of those paraselene so frequent in northern climates. But even this last rag of hope was quickly to be dispelled. A still lighter glory now flashed along the horizon to the right of the second risen moon, and in a very few seconds a huge orb sailed slowly in the night air behind the withered aloe-stalk. Two others to the right and left of it also appeared before its lower limb had quite cleared the horizon: and as yet another (the smallest of all this system of moons) emerged above the horizon a little to the right of the huge central orb, this latter cleared the crown of the withered aloe-stem and I observed another small moon (previously hidden by the aloe) clinging close to the disc of the central moon—a lunar satellite which was very soon after occulted. I was now indifferent how many more might or might not appear and in fact only one moon showed itself above the horizon—a large moon, the outermost of the system—which as it were brought up the rear. They were all of different sizes and at different distances from the huge central orb, and if this fact rendered it difficult to entertain the theory of their being paraselene, the occultation of the smallest moon behind the central sun-moon finally eclipsed, at the same time my last lingering hope that this might be the true explanation of the phenomenon. It also negated a theory I had begun to hope might be the correct one:—that my state of double consciousness had effected the lens or optic nerve and caused this strange perversion of vision. Then I felt my arms and body, to be sure that I was actually alive and began to count and reason to convince myself I was really in my right senses. Yes, I was in the flesh, standing upon firm ground, and possessing the full use of my mental faculties. Still as if hoping against hope, I picked up a stone and flung it at the huge systems of moons, under a sort of wild impression that perhaps it would strike the disc, the six moons would coalesce and I should find myself again under the dispensation of our familiar well loved satellite. But the stone described the

usual parabola, fell to the ground a few paces away, while the moons looked down from the sky unmoved and as if in mockery at my despair. Then a panic seized me at the idea of being plunged alone into the abysses of space, journeying on I know not what planet round I know not what immeasurably distant star, isolated from every form of being, I had ever known, destined soon to be the prey of I know not what cruel nondescript, for as cruelty was the universal law upon our earth, I assumed that it must be equally universal in the heavens. With a shout of dismay I tore along at a frantic pace over rock and stone and sand. I ran until I was exhausted—how far I know not—but my heart again sank within me when I stopped for lo! there on the sand were again three gigantic foot-prints apparently of some enormous bird planted triangularly, but no further spoor of any sort was traceable from the spot they occupied. Now, however, an idea occurred to me, which gave me a melancholy sort of consolation. I might at all events be still attached to our solar system. The planet I was on might be Neptune—whole abysses of space away certainly from our beloved earth and our central sun, but still I felt not utterly alien and cast-away with this link of brotherhood between myself and humanity. True, terrestrial astronomers had only discovered a single satellite belonging to the planet Neptune, but might it not be that owing to the immense distance between Neptune and the planet Earth and the imperfection of our terrestrial telescopes it had been impossible to obtain sufficient clearness of definition to resolve the group of moons into their constituent elements, so that from the earth they appeared as one. This conceit pacified me a little for awhile (poor consolation though it was), but alas! it was not destined to be confirmed. I need hardly say that so long as the system of the seven moons held the field no stars at all were visible, everything was flooded with an intensely white light not much inferior to that of day; but I observed very soon that the moons,

unlike our own, hung continually at a low angle above the horizon, were travelling consequently through a small arc of a circle and in fact would set long before the appearance of another day. Indeed they did so set. Though I do not profess to give a scientific explanation of all the phenomena observed in the sphere to which I had been translated, I may perhaps be permitted to give here the explanation of this fact as it was given to me later on. So many things will require clearing up that it will be as well to get this one out of the way. The low elevation of the moons then above the horizon was due to the large angle their common orbit formed with the plane of the ecliptic of the planet. When the planet was at one end of its orbit round the central luminary, the lower loop of the lunar orbit dipping south faced the sun, consequently the upper loop of the lunar orbit faced the darkness of stellar space, and at that time of the year the northern hemisphere of the planet was lighted by a system of moons which never set about the pole and described a great circle through the zenith in the temperate zone, while on the equator, the lunar altitude above the horizon had much declined, and as one approached the southern pole of the planet was altogether effaced, so that no moons at all were visible; when however the planet was at the other end of the orbit round the central luminary, the position of things was reversed, no moons at all were visible in the northern hemisphere, while they shone unsetting night and day at the planets southern pole. It follows therefore that whatever planet I was on I was at any rate not near the equator but in some tolerably high northern or southern latitude. But when the moons set and the starry heavens flashed out suddenly in their full splendour, I looked about me in utter dismay, for the whole framework of the heavens was completely changed. It was a strangely solemn experience, this watching of the seven moons as they plunged in succession underneath what I will for the sake of convenience call the north-west horizon of

the planet:—the reader will understand that this orientation is purely arbitrary, whether the planet revolved from right to left or from left to right, whether its poles pointed to our north and south, or in a direction that was neither north, south, east or west nor any combination of these elements, being in fact in a different plane altogether, is a matter of trifling importance, considering that the whole system was whole heavens away from the earth-pellet from which I sprang. As the last of the seven moons which formed the magnificent moon-system plunged below what I will, then, call the north western horizon, a thrill, which combined agony and delight, rapture and despair, filled my whole inner existence, a thrill such as perhaps animal being feels at the moment of dissolution, when the forces upon whose scaffolding it was built up, fall away and tremble through the illimitable inane. A thrill of misery and despair, for my worst dread was more than realised by what I saw above, a thrill of rapture and delight at the magnificent spectacle of stellar glory which leapt in an instant into existence. It was true then, but if the truth was death, the death was glory. I looked up into a perfectly cloudless dome of space, of a deep velvety purple, the milky way had vanished, only in the northwest glowed two enormous Magellanic clouds of a circular form, more homogenous and far outshining in brilliance the terrestrial galaxy. But if the milky way had vanished, something else had vanished with it, the sparsely scattered constellations that, seen from our earth, appear to be arche-types of all that is most immovable, most imperturbable in existence. But they had so vanished not because the midnight sky was dimly lighted, but for just the opposite reason, this namely that the host of stars of the third, second, first and even higher magnitudes, was so innumerable that at first sight at all events, it was impossible to combine them in fanciful figures of any kind, the splendour of the spectacle of their glory so completely absorbed every effort of the imagination. There

were of-course myriads of white twinkling stars such as ornament our own heavens, but standing out among them like rulers of the starry host were hundreds, aye thousands of coloured star-suns, many times brighter than Sirius itself, jewels—bright jewels—burning through the inmost veil of heaven, emeralds that outmatched the lizard's scale, rubies of an intenser glow than the water of life itself, crystal turquoise more liquid than the sapphire, sapphires of a deeper hue than the most translucent ocean, diamonds to which diamonds were but as coal dust, crystals of a yellow-like transfigured gold, ethereal butter-cups, by the side of which the topaz of the mine had looked dirty and obscure like a splash of muddy water. But of all the marvels of the unearthly vision, the one that most rivetted the attention, was what I suppose was a double star-system, hanging somewhere near the zenith, and so near to the planet on which I was that the two orbs which composed it cut through the night heaven as two small discs of blood red and leaf green colour. As I beheld them so high above me, I seemed to see in them the arche-types of that dualism of the red and green iron salts in their double series, on which depended the dualism of earthly vegetable and animal existence in their double series, also red and green, of the whole terrestrial life dualism in fact, that thin film that gathered upon planetary surface, that faint echo of a sigh from the terrestrial planets' life, that ebbed away into the night utterly imperceptible even in its totality of space and time, whole universes away from the new heaven in which I hung. And then they unavoidably suggested to me a much less sublime comparison:—it was impossible in fact not to be reminded by them of the red and green night signals of our railways, that rete mirabile handicraft ingenuity has paved and laid down also in blood and iron. But soon the splendour of their eternal glory drove out of my mind this taint of a comparison with earthly things:—oh! these bright jewels—these coronals of unspeakable magnifi-

cence—what wonder that Margaret—the pearl of pure, unsullied, abstract existence—Brahm—the atman—the unimaginable Essence—had bartered its ineffable virginity to possess them to be robed in that purple divinity of the night heaven, to be blinded with the sheen of their magic lustre, even though it was all a mere illusion that obedience to the night, even though those bright jewels, when they clasped one in their iron prison houses, were but a theatre of blood and tears and groans, a charnel house into which Mara—Mephistopheles—the god of Death—had enticed the pure existence, a witch's cavern of apedom's filthy sorceries, a Brocken of Demoniac power with the clank of the iron chains of mad-house and gibbet at the end of it. But, perhaps, this very pessimism was itself a shadow of the earth-taint I had brought with me into this new heaven and new earth. According to the primitive earth-pellet religions, not only was the earth the basis of everything, but the savage just emerging from his state of sheer, apish animalism was the creator of everything. He threw up his right shoe and it became the sun, he threw up the left and it became the moon, he threw up a handful of stones and they became the stars: The primitive insanity of religious ignorance did indeed give way at last before the observation and reasoning of primitive scientific man, but only to be replaced in later times by the more insidious because systematized insanity of theological assumption which borrowed the reasoning developed by and inseparable from observation in any true connection, to bolster up its own nonsensical preconceptions and baseless systems of a priori thought: thus in a material sense, the world when no longer imagined as a flat, plate-like base of things was held to be the centre of the universe, a little sphere, the core of a still mightier one, but still the centre, that satisfied the man-ape's vanity to which hecatombs of disbelieving man-ape's were sacrificed by believing ones. And spiritually regarded, as the theatre of the stupendous moral mystery of the atonement, and the tragedy of Calvary it was held

in a still deeper sense to be the centre of the universe, all whose worlds, sun and planets, system on system, world without end, were held to be under the special rule and governance of the human being executed on the cross under the sanction of the Roman authorities by a score or so of narrow-minded Jewish fanatics, to the very furthest limit of the starry universe, the innumerable hosts of living beings that formed the life film of its planetary worlds, partook of the ineffable spiritual benefits conferred by the sacrifice of that particular human being, at that particular immeasurably brief instant of time, backwards and forward through all eternities of space and time. Even when the earth-pellet was finally dethroned and given its true place among infinities, the fiction of its being the moral, spiritual centre of the universe was still insisted upon, is so in fact by numbers of believing Christians at the present day. I should not have dwelt upon this fact, so irritating as its enunciation must be to religious vanity, were it not that religious dogmatism and cobweb spinning have reacted upon minds that would be the first to repudiate any sympathy whatever with Revelation. The primitive savage believed a savage man to be the creator of all things, Christianity, forced to abandon this idea, still stoutly maintains that a man is the Saviour of all things, and science too much perverted, by a secret hankering after Religion, has been so far led astray by its ravings as to assume in some of its conclusions that man is the *measure* of all things. In speculating upon the possibility of certain planets being the seat of life, it is tacitly assumed that the atmosphere of the planet and its chemical composition must be like that of our own world if any form of life is there evolved: bilateral symmetry, the result of the particular way the primitive cell halves, quarters itself, etc., on our own planet is assumed to be an essential characteristic of rational living beings everywhere, a body composed of the same elements, kept in electrical activity by iron and in connection with the terrestrial electricity, itself a

function of the solar, is also likewise held to be the rule of life everywhere. But may not our bilateral symmetry and our chemical composition be two sides of the same thing. In a word, in other worlds may not the primitive cell, composed of different constituent elements, divide according to other series than that of 2, 4, 8, 16 a.s.f. with a correspondingly different mental development and a correspondingly different sort of bodily symmetry, again our scientific philosophers are too ready to assume that the rational beings of other worlds must possess stable bodies like our own:—but we have not sufficient data to allow us to assume positively that this is the case in worlds where the mass, and gravity are very different from what they are with us, where the proportion of the chemical elements is most likely far from being the same, and where lastly the central sun may be so much hotter or colder that the corona and photosphere are either much more extended, consisting of elements in very different proportion and much more dissociated than in our sun, or else contracted round the sun's globe and much less dissociated than is the case in our central orb. Supposing the mass and density to be much less than that of the earth and the electrical interaction between it and its sun much greater, I do not see the necessity of accepting bodily permanence of form as a necessary condition of rational existence. It is quite conceivable that on such a planet the inhabitants either change their form automatically with the course of the seasons or have the power of changing their bodies pretty much as we change our dress to go to a ball or a dinner party. Indeed it is inconceivable that an all-wise and all-beneficent creator should not somewhere in the starry universe have created one planet where the hideousness of tailor-made costumes has no place and where tailors and milliners with their scissors, geese and bills have no power to madden and distract a cloth-made society, and if this argument be deemed irreverent by reverend theologians and divines, I would ask them in what is it more so than their own

theologizing which assuming a Deity in accordance with their own prepossessions of what a Deity ought to be, proceed to deduce from him by dubious logical processes all the superstitions on which their hearts are set, that Dispensation and that Providence which best further their own clerical ambition and love of power, that future life which best accords with their own masticatory, beef and mutton eating proclivities in this. But to return. How little reasonable it is to believe that every rational being in the practically illimitable universe is formed exactly upon the pattern of earthly animal life may be conjectured in another way. The chemical elements as we know them upon the earth itself, form natural groups. Thus chromium and iron are metals closely resembling one another in physical properties and forming oxides and salts in very similar series and proportions. The same is more or less true of nickel, cobalt and even arsenic which, however, in analytical chemistry belongs to a different group of metals. Now we know at all events that the elements are found in very different proportions in different stellar atmospheres. It seems likely therefore that such planets as play around the stellar suns will also have the elements distributed in different proportions. Again would iron, the magnetic metal par excellence in our solar system, be equally magnetic on a planet whose sun had no iron in its composition, seeing that we now know to what an immense extent terrestrial magnetism is a function of the solar. But assuredly it is the particular properties of iron in our solar system that make it the essential vehicle of life upon the planets of that system. So then granted the stellar sun of different composition, it almost seems to follow of necessity that the basis and vehicle of life on its planets should be some different substance than iron. Let us suppose a planet in which the similar and highly magnetic metal chromium replaces iron as the mainspring of that seesaw known as animal and vegetable life which goes on there. Here is a very slight shifting of the constituents and the environment.

But chromium is a metal distinguished by the variety of colour in its iron-like series of salts. The inhabitants of such a planet then, we may imagine, would be much more variable in complexion than they are with us, we should have human beings or their substitutes of brilliant yellow, crimson, emerald and azure tints, and perhaps in such a planet it would not be a metaphor to say that so and so grew purple with rage, green with jealousy, blue with cold, white with anger or yellow with spite.

Let us now turn our attention to the double stars. Assuming life within or upon them or upon a planetary system accompanying them how totally unlike terrestrial life, must the evolution of the whole vital series there have been and consequently the form composing that series and their present descendents and representatives. In a green and red double star, for instance, where the light from each of the twin suns is filtered through photosphere's or atmospheric media which absorb all but the red and green rays respectively, what are the forces which form the scaffolding of life upon the companion planets? Who can say whether some force totally different from electricity may not be the basis of animal existence in such a sphere? And again how inconceivably different must the whole order of existence be in a planet lighted alternately by red and white suns, at times by both, with days and nights of varying lengths and varying brightness, perhaps long pauses of darkness and coma and in general with a complexity of seasons and periods which it would task the ablest mathematician to unravel and define. And if we now imagine a planetary system involved among still more complex systems of coloured stars the mind reels at the contemplation of all the vital possibilities such worlds may enclose. Turning lastly to those magnificent reservoirs of vital force, the star-suns like Sirius and Vega, small universes in themselves of light and heat, whether we believe the whiteness of their light to be due to the less absorptive power of the circumambient vapours, or to the more complete disso-

ciation of what we term the chemical elements in the body of those gigantic suns, if indeed these two alternatives are not really one and the same phenomenon seen from different sides, is it conceivable that the tremendous energies there in force, produce electrical phenomena in the attendant planets of a kind identical with what we experience in this world? Is it not far more reasonable to suppose that with every fresh dissociation of the elements comes the evolution of a deeper phase of force so that with every completer dissociation a nearer approach is made to that intense mode of being underlying all, where force and matter are merged in one? Such were some of the reflections and trains of thought evoked by the myriad eyes of that night of jewels, that divine miracle of the Illusion, where the primitive Mephistopheles and Martha contrived their universal tragi-comedy, inveigling the pure pearl of the absolute, the Unconditioned—Margaret—das Weibliche—into the toils and trammels of earthly existence—the iridescence of the dying Dolphin. The speculations about the inhabitants of these distant worlds, however brought my thoughts down from these speculative heights to the more practical question what sort of beings were they who inhabited the planet I was on. Were there any? Or had I been flung there to perish of starvation—outcast of all outcasts—in the wilderness of a dead or dying world? Those questions the scanty vegetation and the twice seen footprints on the sand conclusively negated. Was I then destined to be scared out of existence by some mode of being frightful in its novelty to our unaccustomed senses? The close resemblance between the general features of the country in which I was and many portions of the surface of our own earth—the growth of palms and aloe-like trees and also the presence of an atmosphere which it was possible for a human being to breathe, rendered it probable that the creatures which inhabited it were not wholly dissimilar to those I had been accustomed to. But would they come or would they leave me to die of inanition? Or if they

did come, would they treat me as black men treated white men, as whites treated black, as difference in our world at least always treated difference as something to be eaten, tormented, or destroyed? Even if they showed me hospitality I should only be like a linnet in a cage utterly remote from the pleasure of the woodland. After all death would perhaps be pleasanter. Horror of existence—horror such as the social hell of Christianity inspires alternated with the terror of death—the instinct of our brute life handed down from æon to æon—like the systole and diastole of the beating heart—like a mocking echo in life the earth-born miscal happiness. And like all emotions the rythmical sway of this horror rocking to and fro, like a rocking stone of boulder granite, or the last plunges of a desperate shipwreck, wearied out the brain, gradually my eyelids dropped, even in that night of splendour and delight and mystery and horror and despair, until my spasmodic efforts to keep them open themselves grew rhymical the jewelled skies and the dusky landscape by fits and stars eclipsed themselves the glimpses of them imprinted on my retina came at longer and longer intervals like the spasmodic flickerings of an expiring lamp and then at last they ceased altogether and I fell into a sleep at first deep and dreamless:—so calm and undisturbed that it may well conclude this chapter . . .

CHAPTER VIII

THE PLANET OF THE SEVENFOLD UNITY

The question whether the planet I was on was inhabited or not, and if so by what sort of creatures, was answered much sooner than I expected and in a wholly unlooked for manner:—towards morning the increasing light stimulated the dreaming faculties and I had the following vision: I dreamed that I was standing by a tripod on which I was solemnly cremating myself, and for this pur-

pose was throwing into the flame, kindled upon the chafing dish, myrrh, frankincense aloes and various other resinous balsams and aromatic oils. Under the stimulus of these inflammable substances the flames leapt higher and higher, then the fiery column suddenly descended and broadened out horizontally into two large sheets of flame, these seemed to gather round me, all at once I found myself on a chafing dish in the very heat of the burning:—the tripod rose from the ground, spread its two fiery wings, flew through the air and whirled me along with it. The shock awoke me and then I found to my terror and astonishment that I really was in the clutches of some huge bird-like creature, which was apparently carrying me off to his cery to feed his young with. However, the flight was so invigorating and my fate was now so utterly beyond my control, that in a short time I felt neither fear nor apprehension, only an agreeable sort of curiosity to know what would be the next move and how I should ultimately be disposed of. I would wager a good deal that at this point in my narrative none of my readers, (unless indeed it be some of the fair sex, whose curiosity at times leads them into the objectionable practise of looking on and thus spoiling an author's best and most studied effects of contrast and surprise), I say I would wager a good deal that no reader, who has conscientiously plodded through the mazes of this discursive and ill-connected romance, has any more idea than I had myself as I was being hurried through the air at the rate of twenty miles an hour, what was the singular fate in store for me or rather what the very peculiar roll or rolls which I was destined to play there. As to the sort of creature in whose power I was, I could only make vague conjectures. I was tied up in a kind of bundle or hammock and only from time to time caught the flash of a pair of broad spreading wings that shone in the sun with a golden metallic lustre. At last, after towering to an amazing height into the air, so that I could hardly breathe the rarified atmosphere, I felt by strong

internal qualms that we were rapidly descending, there was a sensation of balancing, a tremendous fluttering of feathers, then a sharp shock, which sent a quiver through the bony framework of the creature in whose hands I was, and we stood stock-still on what I could see was a broad surface of artificially levelled marble. At the same instant I heard what sounded like a number of fugues played simultaneously on several different organs, but all harmonizing together with contrapuntal exactness, I was somehow aware that this was the language of the beings I was among, I felt a kind of resonance in my brain and then the phrases that had been used translated themselves automatically into my own language and I repeated them over mechanically to myself. They were as follows:—"Yes it was exactly upon the spot predicted by the calculations." "How wonderful, and so closely resembling an embryo in Parthal. Oh we shall succeed." What these extraordinary words meant the sequel will explain, and I shall have an opportunity of discussing the language of the Karauthmachs (the name of the mysterious beings who now swayed my destiny) and showing how it was a necessity of the laws of mind and matter that what they said should be intelligible to minds of lesser potency in the sphere of animal existence than their own. But at present I feel that I owe an apology to one of the greatest potentates of the present age, with whom it is of far higher importance to stand well, than it is to enunciate the grandest of scientific generalisations if they run counter to her inspired prepossessions. I refer to the illustrious Mrs. Grundy and, indeed, also, to a great goddess of the Ephesians her bosom friend and crony, Miss Goody-Goody, the nymph into whose grim and prim individualism, the Pagan nine with all their native grace and Grecian health and beauty, have now dwindled, she whose critic shears so lop and prune and purify the Anglican literature of the present day, in deference to her poppet the young, person's immaculately wooden morality, that our fiction's euphemistic twaddle

serves only to stimulate our national and religious vanity and to put wise men to sleep. I say I owe a deep apology to the bombazeen oracle who rules our British destinies—aye a most profound apology, though it is only for a single word. And I am all the more ready to humble myself before the divine avatar of Grundyism:—because I have allowed myself to express, with too much frankness perhaps, the little respect I feel for her elder sister who has had the forming of her—Religion:—if then when she read the fatal word Mrs. Grundy felt a little shiver of conventional surprise, if she held up her two hands from the wrists in a parallel and perpendicular position, if a shrill little sigh of dismay trembled through the solidly rolled columnar curls which support her face like the two columns of a greek temple in Antis, if indeed it has given her quite a turn so that she has had to have recourse to her peppermint and, perhaps, even to something a little stronger, if she whispered to herself the word “embryo” and with two tight-little lips and a bewrinkled jowl the ominous phrase “oh shocking” let her reassure herself:—rather than cause the slightest derangement in that august interior, which an intellectual peeping Tom, who once desecrated the keyhole of her toilet vinegar-scented boudoir has confided to me—but then the wretch was drunk—consists exclusively of unsaleable copies of the Queen newspaper, and a constipated mass of proof sheets of Routledges’ and other etiquette books, rather, I say, than cause the slightest derangement in those august Penetralia, I will give only a mutilated and imperfect account from an anatomical point of view of the mysterious beings, with whom I came in contact in the Planet of the seven Sexes, and if the Physiologists and Natural Historians are inclined to feel indignant and to cry out at any lacunæ, they may find in the narrative, let them not ascribe such lacunæ to any lack of materials or to any unconscious omissions on the part of the writer, but set them down to their true account—the prurient prudery of an unnatural age, and if they condemn these reticences,

lay the blame on the right shoulders, remembering that they are a sacrifice to Grundy.

To return to my narrative. For a while I remained without moving. A sort of numbness affected the muscles of my neck, and only little by little I gained sufficient force to look round. When I did so, I found that the beings, whoever they were, I had heard about me were flown. I was on a huge plateau-formed artificially of the summit of a mountain, and so extended in every direction, that from the middle of it, where I lay, nothing was to be seen but the vast dome of the heavens. The sky was cloudless and of a pale coppery tint, and in one quarter of it, which I will call the south-east, flushed an aurora of white light, so brilliant that it was impossible to look upon it. Indeed, together with the light emanated some kind of repelling electric force, which acting upon the nerves made it impossible for any one to turn the head in the direction from which it sprung, and this was a wise arrangement of nature, for the light was so dazzling that it would have instantly blinded any eyeball that looked upon it unprotected. The rays scintillated from a point which moved across the sky from east to west as the planet revolved upon its axis—but no solar disc was visible even when one looked at the solar apparition through smoked glasses—it was only one dazzling sea of glory—one of the stars as I learned afterwards in the neighbourhood of Vega—the great double star in the constellation of the Lyre. But the platform itself was by no means bare and unoccupied. In one direction lay a vast truncated pyramid carefully oriented, similar in structure to the great pyramid of Cheops before its completion. It was used and indeed was actually in use as an observatory. Huge moveable domes, gigantic reflectors and equatorials, transit instruments and the like were also conspicuous upon the plateau—instruments of a size which dwarfed into insignificance the celebrated American Cambridge Reflector and the no less stupendous cylinder of Parson's town. There was moreover besides coils and

spirals of stupendous prisms, no doubt the equivalents on a large scale of our spectroscopes, a tremendous cupola of apparently perfectly homogenous glass without a flaw, carefully luted to the ground by its lower limb upon a vast disc of glass near which was a staircase descending underground and sloping towards the huge structure, communicating also as I discovered afterwards with a subterranean passage underneath the vitreous disc, which passage in turn communicated with a shaft rising into the middle of the circular platform upon which the dome was placed. Soldered into the dome at one side of it and forming an angle with it like the gnomon of a sundial stood out a long thick rod of yellow metal, which at the distal end terminated in a broad horizontally disposed, rake-formed excrescence furnished with a double series of closely arranged metallic teeth, drawn out at the end into long vibratile filaments, other apparatus there were all of huge dimensions and of a structure, and formed for uses of which I was wholly ignorant. I was then in some kind of Bird-land, a planet in which the Lords of creation had been developed out of bird-forms instead of Simian, and to this climax the judicious reader has most likely conjectured the romance was tending. He will have observed the passage contrasting bird and especially swallow-life with the life of human beings and noticed how his mind has gradually been prepared to realize the fact of the existence on this distant globe of a kind of huge bird-angels—the inhabitants of the planet of the sevenfold unity—called among themselves by a fugue phrase which in its resonance in the human brain translated itself into the word “Karauthmach”. Moreover, when the three bird footprints were twice discovered on the sand, he will probably have abandoned himself to the conviction and perhaps have felt a little disappointment at the thought that after all the whole conceit was only an imitation of the Aristophanean cloud cuckoo-town in the Ornithes. And here I almost wish, that it was only some such conceit and that I could shape the course of

the narrative and the form of the mysterious beings I was among according to the dictates of my own imagination and fancy, for I dread lest the strangeness and novelty of the actual facts of what I have to write and the actual forms of the creatures I was among will excite among the ignorant derision, among the learned, contemptuous incredulity, and that thus the very fidelity to nature and fact of all I here relate will prove the most serious stumbling block to its general acceptance.

Doubtless I had been left awhile by myself upon the platform from a delicate desire on the part of the Karauthmachs (I shall use this resonance phrase as one may call it to describe them) to accustom me to the new sphere in which I was, to the new relations with being I should have to form there, and to the marvellous and unheard of destiny which was in store for me in the near future. But now the period of probation was at an end and in a moment, in an instant, without any sound of his coming, without any flash of his glorious wings, the Karauthmon (for such is the singular form of this word), who had brought me to the platform, was again present, overshadowing me like a colossal statue raining the Memnonian music from above. The silence and mysteriousness of his second appearance was not due to anything of a miraculous nature, he could not take himself to pieces in one place and then precipitate himself in another, as the dupes of Koot Mahoomi Lal and the Thibetan brotherhood imagine their very astute Mahatmas to do as easily and with as little provocation or premeditation as a fat Mahommedan smokes his Hookah or drinks his sherbet, or as the orthodox Christian believes the loaves and the fishes of the thaumaturgist to have multiplied out of a few scraps of stale bread and fish.

Such gross ideas belong only to the fanciful realms of spiritualism and superstition. The explanation of his sudden apparition was an extremely simple one. He had descended in the line of sight between myself and the dazzling light-giver, whose rays automatically prevented

any living creature from looking upon its blinding radiance. In a moment he was beside me. What an apparition of force and majesty and, in one respect, for which I have prepared the reader and which I almost wish I could dissemble and present to his mental eye, merely an idealised condor or eagle, I fear he will consider of grotesqueness. The stupendous being who overshadowed me towered fifteen feet above the platform upon which he stood and (I had better get it over at once) was three-legged. This was the explanation of the three bird footprints I had seen upon the sand, and which had puzzled me so much the day before. Yes, he was a three-legged colossus, each leg about 7 or 8 feet in height, consequently the thigh part of it was above my head. The upper part of the tripod was clothed in a deep bronze coloured plumage, strongly metallic like the trogons, from the knee downwards the shank and calf of the legs were tolerably human in form, the foot was half human, half avian, the three toes being arranged to face forwards in such a way that it looked very much like a three toed human foot, in-fact not unlike that with which the stage Mephistopheles is ordinarily represented. The texture of the skin of the legs as well as of the face and of the rest of the body differed upon close inspection from ours. It resembled fine grained marble smoothed but highly polished and of a pale amber color. Lit up by the sun the appearance was in a literal sense dazzling, a complexion such as is not to be found even among the descendants of the divine race of Greece in the secluded islands of Lipari, where fair hair and a pale amber complexion of marble translucency are occasionally to be met with in combination. Above, the loins, the trunk and breast of the Karauthmon were human but of course of superhuman dimensions and magnificent proportions. The arms and hands were also like our own. The head was small, beautifully posed upon the shoulders, and the features, though suggesting a human face in one respect avian, that is to say in the—to our

eyes almost grotesquely short upper-lip and the wide gape of the mouth. The nose was delicately formed and aquiline, the face square and the brow low. Here the skin was of satin-like delicacy of texture, the complexion superb, not the faintest trace of a wrinkle was perceptible anywhere about the brow or cheeks, nor were any puckerings visible when the Karauthmon spoke: indeed, the features kept constantly their serene repose, the expression of the emotions being confined exclusively to the magnificent pair of eyes, larger in proportion to the face than ours, consequently more than three times the size of ours, formed of the most brilliant turquoise crystal of diamond clearness and intensity. Out of them were shot glances of mirth of fire, of wrath, of solemn intensity with the changeful rapidity of an april-day, as though the whole soul of their possessor were indeed concentrated behind the shining orbs. The eyebrows were delicately arched and pencilled in fine feather of a chestnut brown black color, the hair consisting of larger feathers of brilliant metallic gilt rolled back from the square fore-head, much as the black hair of young musical geniuses in Hungary and Austria has a habit of doing: it rolled down the back and clothed the wings with wing feathers also brilliantly golden of some fifteen feet in length, the full spread of the wings of these magnificent creatures being not less than ten yards from tip to tip. In repose they were folded much as those of the imaginary angels of Christian romance and art are wont to be represented. For a time I stared at him in blank astonishment, not so much awestruck as without the power of speech and utterly unable to collect my thoughts. The Karauthmon saw my confusion, and in order to allay it did something which centupled my amazement—with a little hesitation and in a somewhat archaic style of speech he accosted me directly in English. Directly, I say, for the words did not form themselves in my brain as the resonance of his own mode of language, but were pronounced in a somewhat sing-song fashion, it is true,

but still pronounced audibly, so that I perceived his meaning at once. "Doubtless", he said, "you are in wonder at an experience which none of your species has ever had before, and which is destined to become still stranger according to the ideas which you have no doubt brought with you from your own planet. As the one you are now standing upon, is likely to become your permanent home or, perhaps, to speak more correctly, I should rather say homes, I am desirous that you should ask any questions you please, in order to familiarize you with the new sphere of existence in which you find yourself. Address me in your own language, speak it slowly and I have little doubt but that I shall comprehend you." "Wondrous being then," I said, "first let me hear, why I have been conjured hither, I might indeed have said kidnapped in this mysterious manner, and what is the motive of bringing me away whole abysses of space and time from my natural Simian kith and kin. Am I to be killed and eaten, tortured or starved to death?" "The first part of your question", said the Karauthmon with a bland smile, "events will answer, I shall not therefore say anything, but as to the last nothing is further from our thoughts than to do you any wrong. Your death indeed would be as great a calamity to us as to yourself. But have you no curiosity to satisfy about matters not pertaining to yourself. What you have already seen and heard, ought, methinks, to have awakened a desire to know more." "Now, that you have solemnly assured me", I replied, "that no harm is intended to me and that my personal safety is secure I shall indeed have many questions to ask, and the first that strikes me is to inquire how it is possible that I should find beings here capable of speaking to me in my own language, and how I should be able to understand them automatically if I may say so when they speak to me in theirs." "The answer to the latter half of the question", said the Karauthmon, "you will learn to appreciate more fully when you know more of our intellectual and physical power and our special

relations with matter. Some hints of these powers I can give you at once. Look!" So saying he took me up in his hand and placed me facing his right eye. I could see in it my own inverted image two or three times larger than it would appear in the pupil of an ordinary human being. But now, all of a sudden, by some internal mechanism or effort of the will the reflected image was magnified to a colossal size, it became pellucid, not only could I see the surface but also the various lymphatic, osseous and nervous systems, finally it grew to such a size that my visual organ became incapable of receiving the whole of it in its field of vision, and at last the fragment perceptible looked like the web of a frog's foot under a high power of the microscope, one saw the blood circulating, the nerves contracting and expanding and the red and white corpuscles racing one another jostling along, now crowding together, now thinning out in the narrow thoroughfares of the capillaries. Before I could express my astonishment, the Karauthmon had placed me on the ground again and said with a smile:—"You perceive that our eyes are microscopes of a highly compound nature the various lenses of which are under the control of our will. They are also telescopes compared with which the keen sight of your terrestrial vultures is dimmer than the owls at midday. Moreover, our sensorium unlike your species' instead of being confined to the brain center is spread over our whole nervous system. This is due to the fact that phosphorus enters more largely into our bodily composition than it does with beings in your region of the heavens. This again was originally due to the intenser light of our great central luminary and the peculiar forces that emanate from it, so that not only have we more phosphorus to give us inner light, but more external light to act upon that inner, consequently, where you merely feel (the phosphorus in your bodies being too feeble to illuminate the ganglia and peripheral nerves) we see, and having a much larger sensorium at our command, we have it in our power to

enlarge our field of vision, whereas with you it always keeps the same size, thus, when you magnify anything to any considerable extent, you can only see a small portion of it at a time, we on the other hand, according as we magnify the object can enlarge our field of vision and consequently continue to see the whole of it and the interaction of all its minutest particles. Thus, having brought a planet under our observation in the telescope (and our stupendous reflectors and transit instruments have a power many hundred thousand times greater than those upon your globe), we are able to magnify it by a mere effort of our will many times more than the eyepieces of your most powerful microscopes with all their elaborate adjustments could do, and lastly, to supplement this natural vision by systems of lenses compared with which your most magnificent achievements of Ross and Cook are but boiled fish-eyes. Hence it follows, that our knowledge of the universe is infinitely more extensive than that of the sages of your distant earth-pellet, and as the whole of our life consists of nothing but knowledge and the most intimate union with nature, the different solar systems in the neighbourhood of our own have been portioned out amongst different schools or families of observers—you will understand this more fully when I come to speak of our domestic arrangements and the way our species is propagated—a matter which you will find will interest you in a special manner—he said this I thought with a peculiar significance—and the particular observatory on which you stand now is the one devoted to the investigation of your own solar system of which there are seven principal observers, and I am the one who am specially charged with investigating the life and history physical and intellectual of your own little earth and the animals it contains.” He paused a moment, and I hastened to observe that all this caused me the most profound astonishment but that he had strayed somewhat from my question which was how he came to understand English. “I gave you the instances of our

powers of observation," said the Karauthmon, "in order to prepare your mind to accept the possibility of still greater mysteries. I do not wonder at your surprise at hearing your own language spoken on a world so far away from your own: it is partly an accident that we know it better than many other languages of your globe. The numbers of persons by whom it is spoken and its simplicity of construction has rendered it one of the easiest for us to reconstruct from the innumerable broken fragments of language which are contained in the upper stratum of the atmosphere of your world. It is now some four hundred years since a method was discovered of reproducing and then interpreting the vibrations caused by speech in distant planets. You are aware that the atmosphere of your earth is bounded by a spherical surface as clearly defined as that of the oceans and lakes which lie below it. By the time the vibrations of which a word consists have reached this bounding surface, they are too feeble to break through the capillary attraction of its film, being indeed spread over many miles of it, it is then we are able to catch them by means of yonder sloping rod and reproduce them in the prepared atmosphere of the glass-dome from which it projects." He pointed to the glass-dome and rake-like excrescence which I have already described. "Your language," he added, "is particularly favorable for these investigations, for another reason than those I have already given. No known animal or species of animal except the ass is provided with such a stentorian pair of lungs as the species of man called *homo britannicus* and no species of human beings is so ready to mount a tar-barrel and exercise its vocal organs. We have therefore collected a larger vocabulary of the English language than that of any other, thus a noxious habit extremely detrimental to the welfare of your species, has been highly conducive to the success of our philosophical investigations, and if it has compelled us to form but a poor estimate of your place in the scale of animate existence, that is certainly not

from a want of knowledge of your oratory and the modes of thought of the personages who sway your destiny." "What a terrible reflection," I exclaimed, "that the mountains of lies poured forth like cumuli by our politicians, all the claptrap from our pulpits, all the vulgarity and injustice of our law-courts, the fopperies of our saloons, the obscenities of our slums and worst of all, perhaps, the euphemisms and dilletantisms of our literary fops, critics and men of wit, should live and vibrate for ever in the tainted atmosphere of our unhappy planet. No wonder societies grow worse and worse the older they grow, until at last borne down by the weight of the incubus of their spoken thoughts and becoming ever more and more contaminated by the secret invisible presence of this evil legacy from the past, such societies collapse one after the other, their languages become dead languages and the record of their deeds a tale of horror to future ages." "Shall I endeavour to give you an instance of our power in the application of acoustics," said the Karauthmon, "I cannot say for certain whether the prepared atmosphere will act upon your auditory apparatus as it does on ours: however, we can try." I willingly assented to the Karauthmon's proposal: he stamped his foot and the door of the secret staircase flew open. He descended, and I followed him: a matter of some difficulty on account of the size of the steps, as I had to jump or sit and let myself down from one step to the next. At the foot of the flight of stairs was a false floor forming a lift, which worked in the shaft communicating with the dome (the shaft was too narrow to admit the expansion of a Karauthmon's wings). By pressing a spring, my companion caused the lift to rise and land us on the floor of the dome. Here the air was highly electrical, causing me to see trains of sparks in all directions every time I breathed—much as one sees trains of sparks upon receiving a sharp blow upon the eyeball. It was necessary to hurry on the experiment lest this artificial atmosphere should be injurious to my health. The Karauthmon made

several adjustments, I heard a peculiar hissing sound, such as often accompanies a violent electrical discharge, and then all at once broken sentences, many of them in the well-known tones of our popular orators came surging round me. The effect was startling in the extreme, for partly owing to the distance we were from mother earth, partly owing to the length of time the sound vibrations take to reach the surface of its atmospheric ocean, the fragments of speeches I heard had been delivered several years before. Thus I heard fragmentary denunciations, uttered by our most celebrated divines in tones of solemn warning, intended to save their flocks from the blasphemies of modern science—denunciations of scientific discoveries which these very divines now declared were the surest proofs of revealed religion. And strange it was, too, to hear the orators of one political party protesting that the only way of salvation for the Empire lay in resisting measures which, now, they vowed were the only thing wanted to promote its welfare, while the promises of the opposite party at the last general election rang out in strange contrast to the views expounded by their orators, now that they had reached the goal of their desires—the power to do evil and the unchecked measure of the popular exchequer. Only one thing remained unchanged in all the hubbub of voices, the stentorian oaths of the bargees, which broke through the flimsy rhetoric of the pulpit orators and the politicians like volleys of chain shot through a flickering cloudlet of mosquitoes. The experiment only lasted a few minutes, for the electrified state of the air and the concentrated force of the falsehoods and self-contradictions of the orators and statesmen speedily threw me into a state of profound Coma from which the Karauthmon only saved me by hastily closing the experiment and hurrying with me to the outer air where I soon after recovered consciousness.

“What abject miserable beings you must consider us,” were the first words I uttered when I came to myself again, “if, that is to say, you draw any conclusions about

us from what we consider the most divine, the most precious of our human gifts, the faculty of speech." "Not at all," said the Karauthmon good-humouredly, "we do not investigate your planet for the sake of passing judgement upon its inhabitants, but in order by comparing the different forms of planetary being to arrive at a higher knowledge of divine wisdom. We look upon your species from a purely objective point of view: very much in fact as you regard the geese and poultry cackling and cluttering in your own farm-yards." "But not I trust with any ulterior ideas of a masticatory kind", I exclaimed, a cold shiver of apprehension diffusing itself all at once along the marrow of my spinal chord, as I recollected, how very far from the calm generalisations of natural philosophy were the sentiments with which I was wont to regard a fat turkey or a well stuffed capon about Christmas-time. "Set your mind quite at ease upon that matter", said the Karauthmon with a large humorous smile in his immense blue eyes. "How completely baseless your fears are, a simple anatomical fact will amply demonstrate. We possess no stomach, or at least an atrophied one not larger than one of my eyeballs, perhaps I should rather have said that this stomach is specialised for a particular purpose which I shall explain to you later on." "Happy beings," I exclaimed, "to be without an organ from which half the insanities, crimes and vices of our wretched race arise, one half of our wickedness we commit to fill it, the other half is caused by its reaction if it be a hair's breadth too full or not full enough, and as in the dualism of our terrestrial existence perfect equilibrium is nowhere to be found, it evolves this other half with as much precision as we perform the first. But oh! Most adorable quá stomachless being, tell me, I pray you, by what natural mechanism you extract from your surroundings the matter necessary to sustain your earthly existence." "By a very simple arrangement," replied the Karauthmon, "we are provided with a double system of lungs and can at will propel the air through

either of them. You will recollect last evening when you found yourself upon the plateau from which I rescued you, how oppressive the air grew to your senses, so that in fact you fell into a state of trance: this was due to the air being heavily charged in the lower strata of our atmosphere with carbon and nitrogen compounds not altogether unlike the starches and albumen's which form the food of your own species. In point of fact, the vegetation which clothes our land, instead of being principally phanerogamic as with you is cryptogamic. In the deep valleys, which intersect the plateau of our globe, grow huge forests of gigantic cryptogams, it is only on the plateaus and at the bases of the mountain chains that phanerogams, chiefly palms and grasses, maintain a precarious footing, in the vallies the grass is formed of robust and toughened moulds: various kinds of rusts and mildew form the lichens and mosses of the forest numerous sorts of stemonitis, arcyria and the telephoræ, its shrubs and bushes, while sphaeriaceous and myxomycetous fungi form its ever varied and ever varying flora. I am using the names of some of the principal genera of your terrestrial cryptogams, but as a matter of fact, they can convey very little idea of the elaborately branched and whorled varieties which adorn our woodlands, of the huge fungal forest-trees with a foliage of semi-transparent pilei, of the brilliant colours of these pilei, far transcending the brilliant tints of the most gorgeous temperate flora of your globe, of the constant play and change of colours in this foliage due to the large amount of phosphorus in our atmosphere, and lastly, due in part to the same cause, of the magnificent nocturnal illuminations of these forests when every leaf-pileus glows with an innate light changing its colour with every breath of air. Then, again, who that has not seen it can imagine the splendour of the luminous clouds of spores and sporidia shot high into the air and drifted about like a sun's corona far above the woodland, or falling condensed in showers of starry points beyond the

imagination of the most skilful pyrotechnist to conceive, here twinkling like cloth of gold upon the luminous lawns and uplands, here gemming the contracted boles of the mushroom-trees, so that they look like star-inwrought branches of luminous living coral. Towards evening, when we wish to restore nature's exhausted functions and repair the day's waste of tissue, we fly down to these vallies and woodland and satisfy our hunger by absorbing their highly nutritious exhalations." "In fact," I exclaimed, "you live upon rarified catsup: well, I can imagine a worse diet." "It follows, then," continued the Karauthmon without heeding my interruption, "that being independent of food and clothing, in your senses of the words, not being compelled by the circumstances of our surroundings to live a life of perpetual warfare with one another for the bare means of subsistence, of which a pack of, mangry half starved pariah dogs snarling over a Jezebels skull who shall have the scalp of it, is the aptest illustration, it follows, I say, that being exempt from these unhappy conditions of existence we have full leisure to devote ourselves to satisfying the curiosity of our reason and the desires of passion and love which in our case are blended to form a harmonious unity instead of being as in your mode of being, a dualism perpetually at war within itself." "In point of fact," I observed, "you have no vices and can do without them." "Exactly so," replied the Karauthmon, "indeed, it was only upon the discovery of your solar system that we obtained an idea of this remarkable function of matter in its self-conscious existence, our philosophers are still at variance as to the cause of it, but most of them ascribe it to the method of animal evolution on your globe, I mean to the process by which the primitive life-cell on your planets multiplies, that is to say, by halving, quartering, octupling, etcetera, in fact, to life there being evolved by means of the series: 2^2 , 2^3 , 2^4 , etc., instead of some other less simple formula." "So, then", I exclaimed impatiently, "you ascribe what we

call Sin on the idea of which we found our sublime and tremendous Moral Code together with those grand ideas of God and Immortality, which form the basis of all that is grandest and noblest in Humanity, you ascribe the idea of Sin with all its tremendous consequences to the fact that our primitive life-cell halves and quarters instead of —" "Instead of dividing by septenary division as with us, said the Karauthmon blandly," according to the series $7, 7^2, 7^3$, or according to the series $.5^3 .5^2 .5 .5^5 .5^4 .5^3 .5^2 .5^7 .5^6 .5^5 .5^4$, as upon the planets accompanying some of the simpler of the double stars: true what you call your sins and your vices and crimes are terrible in their earthly consequences, inevitable in their sequences of death and misery just because they *are* morbid products of your terrestrial dualism, so that the natural processes of your dualistic dispensation bring about the punishment of this dualism's perversion: terrible indeed is the Gehenna to which sin dooms its votaries in the sphere of your dualistic space and time—is it not a comforting idea, that this is after all only an accident in the space and time-forms in which you live and move, and have your being, which time and space-forms are themselves the merest accident, being due to the fortuitous combination of elements and atoms, in certain proportions, the number of possible kinds of elements and atoms being infinite, while the whole of the phenomenal universe is only due to chilling, to the illusive separation of the It, the Perfect One, the Brahm, from itself to the deadening to an infinitesimally small degree of that perfection of heat and light and life in their essential oneness which is the core of the core of everything in this vast theatre of the Illusion." "So then", I exclaimed half bitterly half with a certain secret sense of satisfaction, "everything is the result of chance. Our bodily forms, our mental, or moral ideas, our theologies—everything?" "Everything," replied the Karauthmon placidly, "except the mysterious properties of numbers and numerical series themselves and what they symbolize we know not. But after all, is

not this only another way of saying what one of your own celebrated prophets expressed as follows—"Behold as far as the East is from the West, so far hath he set your Sins from Him". "But how about the freedom of the will", I exclaimed sharply, for this discussion had aroused the theological antagonism which had so long lain dormant in my nature, and which I had believed was completely dead and buried, "if you are not free to choose between good and evil, how can you possess any virtues and without virtue —" "We do indeed manage to dispense with it," said the Karauthmon quietly, "we are pure sentimento-intellectualisms and find life too short to be wasted in floundering into the bogs of vice, only blessing the light of Heaven by contrast when we have floundered out again and repeating the process, like the Morse dot and dash signal code, as though we were owls blinking in too much daylight, and as though this cut and thrust illumination was the highest our brief lives were capable of. Virtue and vice are simply the mental conception of this practice so common upon your Earth. Believe me, the best kind of virtue is to have none at all." I started at this strange utterance by another of my own reflections. "But I would ask you," continued the Karauthmon without heeding my surprise, "which locomotive is the best—the one that has a will of its own and can quit the rails and wreck the train when it likes or the one that is so constructed that an accident is impossible." "No doubt the latter", I replied. "But best is only another way of saying most virtuous and it is therefore possible without freedom of the will," said the Karauthmon. I did not know what to reply and therefore thought it wisest to turn the conversation. "If you have no struggle for existence," I said, "and no vices, and are endowed with such superhuman faculties you have no need of any Government, for Governments whatever their form, whether autocratic or democratic exist only to prevent the units which compose them from tearing one another to pieces and to do for them

what they are too foolish to combine to do for themselves." "That is so," replied the Karauthmon, "nevertheless, we meet from time to time in congresses of a scientific character to discuss our discoveries in science and those made manifest through our processes of social life." "What kind of society that may be which has no government to turn out at the next election, no stomach to fill and consequently no farmers and no agricultural labourers to oppress and brutalize, no dinner parties to overgorge itself at, no dresses and consequently no frivolous entertainments to display them in, no excesses and no luxury in fact, and consequently no doctors to set right the ills they cause, no vices and therefore no scandal to delight the flock nor anything for their pastors to reprove and amend, no crimes to shudder at, and so no tragedies to stir the soul—what kind of society theirs can be with all that gives society zest and animation left out of it, it is difficult for a Terrestrial to imagine. At all events to his unregenerate human heart, it cannot but appear that such a society must be a very slow one." "We manage however," said the Karauthmon smiling, "to find life so endurable that although we have the power of terminating our existence whenever we choose no Karauthmon has ever been known to quit the sphere of his material activities before three hundred years of age: indeed out of consideration to future generations, and to prevent our planet from becoming overcrowded, it has been deemed wise to lay it down as one of the most stringent laws of our social etiquette, that no one, unless engaged in scientific investigations of the most important kind, should prolong his existence beyond 500 years, as a matter of fact, a Karauthmon who goes on living beyond 400 years, unless for some very strong reason, is looked upon with no very friendly eye as a person of an eccentric character and by no means to be admitted into the best society." "In what then does your social life consist?" I enquired, "and what makes it so endurable that you are loath to quit it, for it must

be confessed that with all the manifold attractions of our blessed Christian State, its charities and its destitution, its psalm-singing and its immoralities, its noble moral sentiments and its heartless practical selfishness, suicides are becoming every year, everywhere more frequent, while the finest of our intellects and men of genius are lapsing into a hopeless pessimism." "Our social life consists", said the Karauthmon, "in the pursuit of knowledge, and the unity of a domestic life, which is so complex that its achievement satisfies every possibility of Karauthmom passion: we have nothing of what you call crime, because we have no struggle for existence, we have nothing of what you call vice, because our passions only become imperative so soon as their gratification is lawful and natural. In your dualistic sphere, where the life-cell multiplies by simple division, domestic life is a dualism and fails to satisfy all the passions even of the dualistic man-ape: hence jealousies, wars, gambling, dissipation and the ruin of families: with us on the contrary the domestic life is a sevenfold unity and as it exhausts every possibility of Karauthmic passion, and no passion is called into play, except in a purely intellectual form, until its gratification is legitimate, there is no possibility of those scandals cropping up which are so common among Christians, and which propagate themselves with such fatal certainty by the impetus their example gives to minds whose morality consists alone of their want of courage to do wrong."

"You paint us," I said with a sigh, "in colours which do indeed outrage all my sentiments of terrestrial patriotism, but I cannot say, you are far from the truth. Tell me, though", I added, "does not the evolution of your life through a primitive sevenfold division of the life-cell instead of through halving and quartering, greatly affect your mental and moral characteristics, that is to say, if you possess any of the latter. You ascribe so many of the imperfections of the human life to its inherent dualism, that your own perfections are, I take it,

the outcome of your happy position under a septenary dispensation." "Most assuredly," replied the Karauthmon, not heeding my covert sneer. "we no more blame your state of being for its self-destructive follies than we plume ourselves on our purely accidental superiority. Minds are merely the Simulacra or ghosts of bodily shape. As surely as crystals, if they think at all, think all pyramids, angles, dodecahedrons, as surely as volvox globator revolves because it is round, and the women of your planet are deceitful because nature has fashioned them hollow (I clapped my hands to my ears and shouted in dismay the name of the great goddess of the Ephesians—Mrs. Grundy, but the wretch would not listen), so surely", continued the Karauthmon, "are our minds and feelings what they are, because we are constructed septi-laterally instead of on the plan of bilateral symmetry." "And your three legs," I exclaimed, "how on earth came you by such an utterly irregular number." "Let me remind you," said the Karauthmon, "that our peculiar kind of symmetry is due to the septenary division of the primitive life-cell in our planet, and that this again is due to the particular combination and proportion of the elements in our sun and its attendant satellites, to the rate of cooling of our planet and the particular forms of electricity and magnetism upon which our life-history is built up. To these same ulterior causes is due the presence of our sevenfold system of moons and also the tremendous hurricanes, which swept round our planet in the earlier stages of the evolution of its living forms. To the interaction of all these causes combined is due the presence of three legs which to you seems so strange and unnatural. We have seven limbs you will perceive—the primitive life-cell being divided into seven segments just as you have four, your primitive life-cell being split first into two, then into four divisions. Now you must have observed that a three-legged table stands firmer than a four-legged one, provided the legs are tolerably even: much steadier than a four-legged one,

while one with only two legs would hardly stand upright at all. Nature therefore evolved us with three legs, in order that we might be able to stand against the tremendous hurricanes of primitive times or, if you like, to put it so, the hurricanes acting upon beings evolved through cells multiplying by sevenfold division developed three legs to withstand their violence. However you choose to put it, our three legs are the result, and although the violence of the primeval storms has long since abated, the stability our three-leggedness affords us is of immense advantage in the astronomical observations in which so much of our life is spent: it has also no doubt reacted upon our mental constitution, so that the possibility of falling into sin is an idea which has no place in our mental economy: your species, on the contrary, having been evolved haphazard from creatures originally intended to go about on all fours (just imagine a four-legged table taking it into its head to erect itself on one pair of legs) has never attained to perfect equilibrium, but goes tumbling about on its one pair of spindle shanks from the cradle to the grave. This has reacted upon your minds, thus it happens that in the sphere of intellect you are constantly blundering and going wrong, while as regards morality you are so perpetually slipping, lapsing and falling that it is all your moralists and religious medicinemen can do to keep you on your legs at all, and persuade you to cut a tolerable figure among your fellow-creatures. Yes, my little tom-tit, my mesange," added the Karauthmon goodhumouredly, taking me up in his hand and stroking me affectionately, "if I were to let you drop this moment, you would as likely as not fall upon your head and crack your skull, whereas we always alight upon our three legs with as much precision as an astrobolus." So saying, he put me down on the ground again, and I at once toppled over as if to emphasize his last observation. The Karauthmon burst into a loud but silvery fit of laughter sounding like the rippling music of Bach or Heller, and this must have attracted the

attention of one of his comrades, for I heard a fluttering of wings in the air in the direction of the now declining sun, and then my Karauthmon also rose from his feet, and I heard the two conversing in their fugue-like language high above my head, but in so low a tone that it was impossible for me to interpret what they were saying. The upshot of the conversation, however, soon became apparent in a way that greatly disconcerted me. My Karauthmon dashed down upon me from the clouds, lifted me off my feet (I had by this time picked myself up) and carried me into the skies, where his companion was hovering in expectation. I remember, I thought he looked at a distance like a gigantic mayfly with his three legs kicking out behind. They placed themselves about four to five hundred feet apart and then began to toss me to and fro like a shuttle-cock. It was in vain I screamed and implored even kicked and bit, and tried to point out, how certain and terrible my fate would be if they let me fall. All my protestations were in vain, my Karauthmon assuring me, that a kind of electric stream passing between him and his kindred Karauthmon rendered it as impossible for me to fall on the ground as for iron filings in the neighbourhood of a strong magnet to resist the attraction of the magnetic current. Little by little, after this assurance, my fears subsided, as I found with what precision I flew backwards and forwards, palpitating, gasping, still indeed blue with fright, but not without a certain exhilaration, long and loud however was my indignation to think that I, one of the same race of beings and formed in the same mould as the divine mortal who on Calvary atoned for the sins of every form of living being on every single planet to the furthest limits of the Milky Way and beyond it, who atoned for their sins whether they had committed any or not, who died for them although they themselves may have died æons upon æons before he was born and lived, and who brought life and immortality to light, although they may never have had the slightest doubt about either

of these important doctrines—it roused my indignation, I say, to think that I, a specimen of the most highly favoured race of beings in the whole immensity of the starry-universe, should now find myself being ignominiously bandied about by these Karauthmachs from hand to hand like a common racquet ball. I clutched at the Karauthmon's arms and would have clung to them, had not a kind of repellent electricity like that which exercises a benumbing influence upon any one who touches the gymnotus or electric eel, paralysed my fingers and rendered my efforts useless, then I endeavoured to stand upright in the palm of his hand, it afforded but a slippery foot-hold, and mustering all the phrases of pulpit oratory I could recollect and suiting my gesticulations to the sense, with ponderous emphasis I insisted upon the irreverence and wickedness of treating a being fashioned in every particular like the Divine Saviour of all the starry-universe in so uncereemonious a fashion. I painted in sombre tints and with all the earnestness of o Spurgeon, a Papist, or a Hindu fanatic the awful penalties to which he was rendering himself liable in that Hell which is prepared for the blasphemous and the wicked, how terrific fiends with red hot pincers would rend his flesh for all eternity, while whole oceans of unbaptized infants, acidulous as sour milk, would swarm about him like abortive gnats and torture his auditory nerves with their never-ending squeals. I told him how his own conscience too would torture him for other whole eternities, eating into his brain and mind like a worm that dieth not, like the mysterious Schamyl of Jewish superstition, like a ship's teredo, until he foundered and sank into other abysses of space and time, where other orders of demons would take him in hand, fry him alive in boiling oil, crush him between ice-floes, and fray him into a quivering mass of agony with their tridents, their own barbed tails, and their rakes and harrows made of fish-hooks and jagged saws. Strange to say, my eloquence had the desired effect so far that it put a stop to the game of

ball in which I had been constrained to play so undignified a part, but the means whereby this desirable result was obtained were by no means such as my oratory had intended. At first my Karauthmon eyed me askance, then, as my gesticulations became freer and my delivery more animated, he tilted his hand or half-closed his palm at the most impressive and solemn passages, when I was bringing my right fist down upon my left palm with the concentrated energy of a Nasmyth's hammer to emphasise the eternal verities I was expounding so eloquently and on these occasions, owing to the law of the composition of forces, my too impressive fist missed its way and expended its too orthodox violence on my nose, my ears, or eyes, or, again, when I raised my hands and arms to heaven in solemn deprecation of his wickedness, calling down fire from heaven upon his head, like Elijah upon the priests of Baal, he caused his hand to tremble like an earthquake, my arms to whirl about like a willow-tree in a storm, and my whole person to dance up and down like a mannikin on a string, or a ray of light reflected from a surface of rippling water. At last, when I came to the peroration of my discourse, he gave his forearm a sharp upward movement from the elbow and chucked me so high into the air, that, when I came down again and found myself squatting astride his two middle fingers, I had completely forgotten the thread of it, and found myself far too much embarrassed and out of breath to deliver it at all, hereupon the Karauthmon uttered a loud peal of laughter, which lasted so long that he was fain to bring the game of ball to a conclusion, alight again upon the ground and set me once more upon my legs. When he had recovered his composure, he spoke as follows:—"Do not imagine, my little midget, that you have been treated thus out of mere caprice: the sun is near its setting and you have had nothing to eat all day: we wish to see whether we cannot adapt your organization to sustain itself in a manner similar to our own—it will only be a temporary arrangement—for a few days

at most. Having thoroughly oxygenized you, we hope, you may be able to absorb nourishment to some extent as we do ourselves." So saying he carried me into the air and flew away with me. I knew not wither . . .

CHAPTER IX

FAIRY-LIKE SCENERY IN PLANET OF THE SEVEN SEXES

On and on we flew at first in silence, for the effort of speech and flight at once was too much for the Karauthmon: at last, however, he tried the experiment of pressing me closely against the part of his body which corresponds with our diaphragm and humming in his own peculiar fugue language. It answered. The sound vibrations were carried along the brain and there translated themselves automatically into my mother tongue. "How is it", I exclaimed, astonished at this strange phenomenon repeated in so singular a manner, "how is it that your mysterious language is intelligible to me, a total stranger to your forms of thought and way of expressing them?" "Our septenary mode of being," said the Karauthmon, "places us in a closer union with nature than does your binary one: if you will reflect upon it, you will perceive that underneath all the phenomenal part of your own existence, your speech, your theorizings, your arts, your poesies and your mechanics, lies a subterranean ocean out of which it is all evolved, a deeply stirred ocean which moves by its own laws, which is the Fate running through your life's brief history, and of which with qualms and heart-shakings you catch a glimpse from time to time in the changes and chances of your earthly pilgrimage. Our being is closer linked to this Essentiality than yours, and therefore we speak in tone which form ripples on its surface, each of the seven notes of the scale striking the vibration or a whole multiple of it, which corresponds with one of our seven sexes and therefore with one of

our seven elementary forms of love: but as the *natural* analysis of our nature, if I may call it so, brings us nearer to the simpler more fateful form of being, underlying all kinds of earthly artificial existence, the expression of our thought in this substratum is transmitted to the underworld of your own being, and there takes the forms of thought particular to your species and nationality." "It is a dark saying," I observed wonderingly, "and yet something of what you say may still be true: And when by an effort of your will you finish your phenomenal life-history: How do you do it, and what happens?" "We do it", said the Karauthmon, "by acting through the will upon the excess of phosphorus contained in our bodies." "In fact," I said, "the flame of life burns the lamp up, whereas with us any trifling accident, a puff of wind, or a splash of water, puts out the flame while the lamp remains." "Just so," said the Karauthmon, "but if you want to see what happens, perhaps we can show you. Archo," he continued, addressing himself to the other Karauthmon who had followed us in our flight, "did not the Pethroi (the supreme council of etiquette of the Karauthmic science congresses) signify to Arotholyess that it was desirable he should yaluth (quit the world) before the 21st?" "It did so," replied the other Karauthmon, "under pain of having his name erased from the roll of Eanoi (elders) and being forbidden to attend the Per-riddez (annual scientific congress). I wonder he has stayed so long." "He was certain to wait until the last moment", said my Karauthmon, "and will no doubt be yaluth-ze (getting rid of life voluntarily) this very moment: it is so near the time of sunset." So saying, the two Karauthmach began to fly in a different direction, and after a little time alighted on a widely extended plateau not far from one of the aloe-like trees I have already mentioned, beside which a tall and magnificent looking Karauthmon was also standing. "Well, brothers," he said to the two new-comers, "so you have come to see me out. I should have liked to have waited to learn

the result of your experiment with the embryo in Parthal, but perhaps I shall know of it or have lost my interest in such matters", he added with a slight sigh. "Here is the substitute for the Estalon," said my Karauthmon pointing towards myself in a way that made me feel extremely uncomfortable, "it fell just as predicted: we feel certain of success." "Well, well, I cannot wait to discuss the matter," said the Karauthmon who was to yaluth, "see, how near the sun is to setting." So saying, he stretched his hand toward the aloe-like tree which I now perceived was not an aloe but a gigantic labiate kind of shrub some 20 feet or more in height. From this he gathered three seeds about the size of hazel nuts, stripped off the rind, swallowed them slowly and then paused a few moments. I noticed, that a peculiar glittering or shiny film seemed to overspread his face and body. "Good bye", he said placidly: turned very slowly and looked straight at the scintillating glories of the setting sun. There was a peculiar flash of phosphorescence in the air and he was gone. "Gone to the sun", said my Karauthmon reverently as he took me up in his arms and we continued our aerial pilgrimage. "And he was over four hundred years old", I exclaimed in astonishment. "What an existence. No disease and no decrepitude and then to go, to vanish to be no more, without a tear, almost without regret." "The Karauthmon did not reply to me, but I thought he pressed me closer to him. However this may be, he gave a soft rippling laugh and, turning to his companion, addressed him thus:—"See, brother, how late it is, let us flap our best wings downward, or we shall miss our dinner." The other Karauthmon said nothing but they hurried on at an increased rate, so that the wind went whizzing round me and set every nerve tingling, and the increased oxydation of my blood threw me into a kind of delirium: at last they drew breath, their wings ceased to flap, except at rare intervals, and I felt that we were swooping downward and covering several miles at each beat of the giant wings: first the plateau

and then their rugged and perpendicular escarpments leapt up towards us like the pistons of a gigantic steam engine, as though they would crush us between the earth and the sky. Gradually the air became closer and warmer, at the same time diffusing a peculiar odour at once savoury and aromatic, high above us the peaks of the mountains glittered in the sunlight, but, below, twilight was already gathering, strange forms of vegetation crept up the slopes at the foot of the precipices, now we skimmed along above a stagnant lake, now above the tree tops of a mighty forest, until at last my Karauthmon hovered in the air, cautiously lowered himself, and at length dropped me upon what seemed like the roof of a chinese pagoda—a circular disc, curled up at the edges and rising in the centre into a small and flattened cone. But let not the reader imagine, that in the fungus forest of the planet of the sevenfold unity, the trees were all formed on the pattern of our common toadstools and mushrooms. By no means. Here and there vast groups of ivory domes, looking like etherialized mosques, did indeed soar above the vegetation of the forest-trees, rising into the purple blue of the sky like huge cumuli clouds condensing in hot weather above the snowy peaks of Alpine Mountains. Here and there a scurfy brown pagoda stood out against the sky-line, its pendant eaves drooping round a thin shaft some two hundred feet or more in height: here and there on reticulated footstalks emerged into the air enormous pezizae, like the chalices of gigantic aerial water-lilies of the most brilliant scarlet, purple and malachite tints, but the vast mass of the forests and woodland did not at first sight differ very greatly from our own hard wood trees, except that the colouring was much more vivid and diversified, the colour of the leaves varying in different species from a bluish purple to the most intense golden and gamboge yellows, so that the woodland at one and the same time exhibited all the colours of the rainbow from the deepest purples to the most evanescent lemon-tints, trees of snowy whiteness

and ebony blackness were also there, even flesh-coloured trees, embodiments of our imaginary dryads, indeed, the only colour not represented was the turquoise of our summer skies and seas under the genial influence of our south-west winds: it was to be noted also that the foliage had a tendency to show metallic tints, some of the trees indeed, resembling the gorgeous plumaged trogons and impeyan pheasants of the east, while the pure chlorophyll green of our grass and fresh palm leaves was entirely absent. In order that the scientific reader may not think that I am drawing upon my imagination in describing a fungal forest with pinnate and even bi- and tri-pinnate foliage completely deciduous and attached to twigs and branches perfectly analogous to those of our own chest-nuts and oak and elm trees, I hasten to give an explanation of what at first appears a very remarkable phenomenon.

If my reader without being a Jinneymescro or man of science has followed the Zincalee's wise aphorism to dick shoön ta rig in zee (to look, hear and keep in mind), he will have observed that many plants, which in the sheltered marshy ground of the low-lands possess a rich mantle-like foliage, exchange this rich apparel as they struggle up the mountain, into chillier less luxurious regions, for leaf clothing better suited to their changed condition of life. There is a certain fleshy luxuriant growing plant only inhabiting marshy ground, known as water-penny wort or hydro-cotyledon, which presents us with the simplest possible form of leaf. It is a form of leaf closely resembling the pileus of many fungi, for instance that of *cantharellus tubœformis*, being in fact simply a green disc slightly pitted in the middle, where the central footstalk joins it. This plant never strays from its native swamps and keeps the mushroom-like form of its leaf. But if we quit the purely marshy ground and search the lush meadows and hedgerows hard by, we shall be pretty sure to find a well-known and very common plant universally recognised in England as ladies' mantle, because

of the richly folded mantle-like leaves with their delicately fringed edges—the plant known to botanists as *alchemilla vulgaris*. Now, if we are in a mountain-district and venture upon even a modest attempt at mountaineering, we cannot fail to observe that, in proportion as the *alchemilla vulgaris* climbs with us towards the summits of the mountains, it leaves behind it its rich leaf-mantle, much as the brave ladies who aspire to be members of the alpine club drop their trains and cloaks and long trailing skirts, until at last they appear in the simple cap jerkin and buskins or tights of the fair damsels who represent the gay company of Robin Hood in the Christmas pantomime: so that at last *alchemilla* in the same way loses all its rich leaf apparel, and dons instead a simple palmate leaf divided like that of cinquefoil or horsechestnut into five lancet lobes. In the mountain *alchemilla* this simple form of leaf is further coated with a silky fleece of gray hairs—like the flowers of the beautiful alpine mountain campanula—, to keep it from catching cold in its new home. Let us take another and very remarkable instance. The most widely diffused species of ash is one with a large irregular leaf something like that of the alder. Next to this comes our own familiar ash-tree, which extends pretty nearly to the extreme north of Scotland and a little above Bergen in Norway (and, be it remarked in passing, that high latitudes in the earth-mountain correspond with high altitudes in the mountain-regions of the earth). This is Iggdrasol—the sacred tree of us Scandinavian peoples—which furnishes us with our Yulelog to burn at Christmas time, the strongly marked annual rings typifying the annular years, which fly away up the chimney one after the other as the Yule log burns, until at last the fire reaches the thin central rod, once the stripling ash in its babyhood, then all falls away into a heap of grey ashes, the thin dust of death, all that remains of us after we have lapsed into our second childhood, and have thus completed the predestined circle of existence. Outside all is white with

hoar frost, just as the yule log's smoothly channelled bole was frosted with the dusty rime of lichen growths, before the fire burnt it up and left it like the forgotten snow-drift a heap of drifting ashes: just as the spring grows under its covering of winter hoar frost, so the tree-life grew under its coat of frosty lichens, but at last a day comes, when the tree-life also comes to an end, just as the living years perish at last and only a few cindery ashes or a handful of frosty rattling snow lash and whistle round the desolate void convex of an extinct and ice-crusted world. Death is the one Immortal, the one Eternity, out of which the Illusion of organic material existence sprang, and into which it returns. But to resume:—The ash-tree, *Iggdrasol*, extends southwards as far as the northern vallies of Italy and the northern slopes of the Pyrenees and Carpathians and the mountains of Thrace and Macedonia. In the more southern parts of the great Mediterranean Peninsulas it is replaced by another form, the flowering ash, closely resembling its northern cousin except that the leaflets are more rounded in shape instead of being acutely lancet as in our own sacred ash, while the quaint black flowers of our *Iggdrasol* are replaced by actual blossom-formed flower-cups. Recollecting that the alder-leaved ash is most widely distributed, the lancet-leaved ash the northern and the rounded leaved but closely related flowering ash the most southern variety, we can, I think, conjecture, what has happened. The alder-leaved ash was the primitive form, as it was driven north-wards into cold tempestuous inclement latitudes, the mantle form of leaf, just as in *alchemilla vulgaris*, became blown and cut into lancet segments, but when this second form, itself a child of the north, spread into southern and more genial climates, the angular forms of the leaves became toned down, the hard knotty little flowers of the northern tree developed a more cup-like calyx, and the flowering ash of the extreme south of Europe appeared. One other instance out of many may be given. The well-known cotton grass

fringing a pond on a well-known Surrey heath in the form of a plant six feet in height with a head of some dozen tassels, the cottony filaments of which have actually been successfully spun into cotton materials. As we trace the cotton grass up a mountain pass, however, the whole plant becomes curtailed, the stem and filaments shorter, the tassels fewer, until about 7,000 feet above the sea in Alpine districts, we find the stem reduced to a thin rush two or three inches in height, and the tassels to a single close cropped dusky mop-like head, which tops it as a small round bottle-brush. Here the opposite has taken place to what we saw in the case of *alchemilla* and the ash-trees: the more complex form having given place to a simpler one, the wind having in fact blown away all the long filaments and superfluous tassels of the lowland growing cotton grasses.

Now, I have already remarked that in the early stages of the history of the planet of the sevenfold unity, winds, immeasurably more violent than any of which we can trace the effects in the strata from which we infer our own world's primitive history, blew continuously over the surface. So violent indeed were they, that the seeds of nearly all the species of plants which had struggled up onto the plateaus and mountains' slopes, were blown into the sea. The struggle for organic existence was therefore for a long time practically confined to the deep vallies and gorges which intersected the plateaus and mountain ranges. Here only a comparatively small number of lichens and mosses developed: only those kinds in fact which could grow upon stones or the bare ground—for there were but few phanerogams to grow upon, these being rapidly crowded out by the fungal forms which thrived better in the damp, humid air of the vallies—, on the other hand the ferns, which would have thriven luxuriantly, were reduced to nothing but huge snake-like rhizomes for a very different reason: the fungi having crowded out genuine phanerogams, found nothing else to grow upon but the ferns, whose rhizomes thus became

the fungal roots, the blending of the two kinds of plant being finally so complete that the parasitism and auto-sitism of the fern and the fungus was hardly suspected. Gradually, the extreme violence of the primeval hurricanes subsided, and then occurred with the fungal vegetation of the planet of the sevenfold unity, what we have just seen occurred with our own ash-trees and ladies' mantle: as they gradually emerged, towered into regions of the atmosphere chillier and more boisterous than their own secluded vallies, the stems branched and bifurcated or rather (owing to the sevenfold cell-multiplication universal in all the life-forms of that strange planet) they split into seven branches each of these again into seven and so on: until they ramified into the inextricable tangle of twig complexity and leaf development. All the larger forms of the fungus-forest vegetation were deciduous, even those which preserved the pileus and cup-like efflorescence so familiar to us in our own woodlands: the stem, however, in most cases hollow, was perennial and generally of a woody, corky, or fibrous texture. That none of our own humbler species should ever have developed into being deciduous, strikes me as remarkable: we see an indication of something very like a hilum in the different arrangement of the fibres in the pileus and the stem of the higher forms of our fungi. Let it not be imagined, however, that the whole forest was a mass of putrefaction during the autumn and winter months: by no means: just as our fairy ring mushroom (*marasmius*) has taken a line of its own and become a plant, that withers and dries up so the innumerable pilei that form the leaves of the fungus-forests have, as they were exposed to the upper strata of the atmosphere, not only become pinnate, bi-pinnate and cut into innumerable leaf-forms, but they have also grown thinner, so that they resemble in everything except colour the leaves of our ordinary hard-wood trees: in texture, in tenacity they could scarcely be distinguished from the crisper sort of leaves: such, for instance, as the oak-leaf, the elm's or the sycamore's. As a result of this

thinning and refining, the gills have been preserved, as in some of our own minute chanterelles and mycenæ only as a delicate system of veining often forming a net-work as in the leaves of dicotyledonous plants, but far more beautiful, owing to the wax-like transparency of the leaf substance. It will easily be seen, that the enormous surface of the leaf-pilei thus produced must cause an immense amount of evaporation. that is to say, they are no longer moist and brittle as in our fungi but tough and leaf-like. On the other hand, the immense amount of water pumped out of the soil and evaporated in supplying these strangely modified pilei, has been lost to the ground, which has thus become drier, but too late for the phanerogams to regain their lost ascendancy, and to become as with us the lords of the vegetable kingdom. This gradual drying up of the ground again, has reacted upon the species which have retained the forms we consider typical of fungal life, the cupola-dome and pagoda-species the consistency of whose pilei is there quite different from that of our mushrooms and toadstools. They also, be it observed parenthetically, are deciduous, like the leaf-pilei of the more frequent species, so that in autumn the huge domes, discs and cauldrons split up into segments and drop off, falling round the root of the tree where they gradually decay, manuring the fern rhizome upon which the fungal form depends, and preserving the base of the huge column upon which they are reared from the extremes of heat and cold and from the attacks of worms and insects. This modification of the pileal forms of fungi through the contemporaneous development of the leaf-pileal forms shows us, in how complex a fashion natural selection works, and how one species of plant or animal through its changes and developments acts and reacts upon another. However, the unscientific reader will already, I fear, have grown tired of this attempt to investigate causes and effects and the origin of the strange forms of vegetation I met with in the planet of the seven-fold unity and is beginning to grumble and to demand

something practical. "Let us hear what you really did see, I hate theory", he is beginning to say to himself as so many say in the present day, actuated not so much by any clear definite repugnance to theory, which only means a distinct view of things, as by an uncomfortable instinct that theory in its true transfigured sense is likely to play sad havoc with hazy notions and ideas so essential to the maintenance of their own long cherished superstitions and beliefs. Let me hasten then to satisfy the yearnings of the Theorist puppet, that sturdy champion of free will, ever led by the nose without knowing it, and groping through a fog from the cradle to the grave, the practical man, your man of action. In the first place then, my eyes ranged vaguely over an immense forest which stretched away into two directions, let us say north and south as far as the eye could see, a forest, not so very different from those of our own woodland districts such as are to be found in Nottinghamshire, Surrey and Hampshire—save only in the far greater diversity of its colouring and the metallic shimmer which overspread it all. Far away to the east and west towered the stupendous walls of the plateaus, which in spite of their considerable distance from where I sat, not a little narrowed the extent of sky visible, so that the vast cupola of the heavens seemed to have its eastern and western rotundity cut off or occulted by two immense lines of terrestrial longitude. The brilliance of the sunset still irradiated with a bright coppery glow the canopy overhead, below which rolled the mighty undulations of the woodland unstirred by the faintest breath of air, as though they had dreamt themselves away into an eternal trance under the alternating glory of the day and night: something of the nature of an accidental clearing occurred round the lofty perch on which I sat, so that it was possible to distinguish with a certain amount of accuracy the forms of several of the species of trees and their foliage which formed the main mass of the woodland. For instance, a stone's throw off grew a magnificent

specimen of one of the commonest of the forest-trees of my new planet-home—a tree, whose growth resembled that of a gigantic horsechestnut, but with lustrous metallic leaves of a vivid green deepening here and there into coppery bronze. These leaves, too, which were seven-lobed, spread out broad fans resembling the foliage of the horsechestnut as the whole tree resembled it in general appearance. Beyond this tree which was about half the height of the pileus upon which I sat, like the bole of a giant palm-tree, a slender shaft shot some 300 feet into the air, crowned with a magnificent head of enormous palm-like leaves semi-transparent and of papery lightness, stained with the lovely pink of some species of tropical conch-shell and looking in the distance like a stupendous canopy of ostrich feathers, half as wide in diameter as the stem was high above which it floated, in a stratum of the air where a slight current waved it languidly to and fro. The stem was of a clear honey yellow, contrasting strangely with the immense pink pilei, whose gills visible through the thin, paper, transparent substance exactly reproduced the crispy and wavy lightness of an ostrich plume. Nearer again stood a huge forest-tree, in growth resembling a large cedar but with a stem and branches like those of the common rough-white coral so commonly seen on huckster's stalls at seaside watering places. The smaller twigs were however of a pale russet brown, and I wish to draw particular attention to the leaves, for they were formed on a system quite unlike that upon which any of our terrestrial foliage has been constructed, and were moreover types of a very large class of leaves in the fungus-forest I am describing. Five small pileoli were grouped like the lobes of the horsechestnut-leaf round the distal end of a stout peduncle: these leaflets or pileoli were of a tough leathery substance more fungal than leaf-like, they were shaped like the leaves of *drosera rotundifolia* or some small dimidiate pleurotus, each leaflet consisting of a flat disc-like expansion connecting with the peduncle by a narrow claw:

to give another illustration, they were much the shape of the petals of a picotee pink: each of the disc-like expansions, however, coalesced by its inner margin with the leaflet next to it, and from each of the four points of junction sprang four other leaflets larger and linked together in a similar fashion, from the three points where they touched each other sprang three still larger leaflets, then two still larger and finally, from the point where the two met, a terminal lobe: the largest of this system of conjugate leaflets. The upper surface of the innermost set of leaflets was a dusky brown, that of the next four a dark metallic green, that of the next three a deep scarlet, that of the next two a light arsenic green, and that of the terminal lobe a transparent red. This effect was due to the leaflets thinning off in proportion as their surface increased, so that the three terminal leaflets were of extreme tenuity. All with the exception of those nearest the peduncle were of the purest white on their under surfaces, and I leave it to the reader to picture to himself what a tree clothed in this gorgeous drapery must have looked like, only adding, that each leaf-system was about the size of a very large spanish chestnut-leaf, but broader across, while the light shining through the interstices lit up the great mass of foliage with a thousand different side lights and blended tints, so that the whole looked now like a vast globe of many coloured crystals, like some gigantic zoophyte spirited there from the depths of a tropic ocean. An immense variety of leaves were as I have said formed on this pattern, the general form of the leaf systems being determined by the shape and number of the leaflets or pileoli, arranged round the peduncle. They reminded one of the pilei of many of our own fungi, which are so apt to coalesce and to throw up abortive pilei from the top of the original pileus. In our own fungi this is often caused by the pileus developing and growing through grass stalks or other impediments upon the ground: with the tree fungi I am describing it may have been the result of the subdivision of the

branches into their net-work of twigs and leaf-stalks. A further modification occurred in this already vastly varied system of leaf-forms. The interspaces in many species filled in, the lines of suture forming a system of venation, within which ramified the still finer vein-systems of the aborted gills. Many trees, however, like our own cotyledon or penny wort mentioned above, preservd the peltate or buckler form of leaf, many of these peltate leaves being several feet across, and finely scalloped round the edges, or hastate like those of the fan-palms. There were also various kinds of trees generally of slender growth, and among the loftiest, whose leaves were compound, being composed of leaflets in the manner of the ash and walnut. The gills were arranged parallel to one another, springing at an acute angle from the mid-rib much as do the veins in the hornbeams' leaf, and the two halves of the leaflets at each side of the mid-rib generally drooped considerably, thus forming an angle with each other like the sloping eaves of a high pitched roof. In these trees the colour of the leaf was generally olive green or some tint of greenish brown, and the upper surface of the leaf was for the most part covered with fine white glossy hairs, as in our common silver weed (*potentilla anserina*).

The gills and spores covered the under-sides of the leaflets, and were constantly being disseminated by the clapping together of the two pendant sides, as they fluttered about in the light currents of the air, which circulated in the upper stratum of the atmosphere. The reader will remark, perhaps, that no mention has been made of any trees at all resembling our pines and larches, nor did I see any, but my Karauthmon, on my appealing to him to know if any such existed, informed me that in some of the vallies, flanked by mountains instead of plateaus, ending in abrupt perpendicular precipices like the valley I visited, a few species of trees occurred with needle like foliage, which certainly must exhibit one of the most curious modifications of leaf pilei known to Karauthmic botanical

science. In these fungal trees, the pilei, as the trees have struggled up the storm-swept mountain sides, have first been rent into leaflets, then these leaflets have grown thicker and narrower, until at last they have come to resemble in some cases the stiff bristle-like needles of the pinaster, in others, the sharp blades of the pseudo-leaves of butcher's broom, or of some of the Australean *Auracarias*. The gills are in these curious leaflets represented by two or three nearly parallel ribs, uniting together to form the sharp needle-like point. These pine-needles are readily deciduous, being reproduced in great abundance as often as a storm of wind or rain clears the branches. But by a remarkable provision of nature, the spores in these modified needle-leaf-pileoli are firmly fixed by their basidia to the thickened gills, so that leaflet and spores are not blown away on to ground and fern rhizomes unsuited to them, as would otherwise be the case, for the members of this curious genus are highly specialized to occupy a narrow zone some few hundred feet wide along the mountain sides: Thus we perceive that the very cause which would have been fatal to their existence has defended them by its modifying effect upon their spores and leaf pileoli against itself. Had the pileoli and spores remained unmodified, the cold dry winds would have blown them beyond the zone the trees were fitted to inhabit. But these very winds, by their physical action upon the leaf pileoli, have so changed the character of these last, as to help them readily to evade the dispersive effect of the winds by dropping to the ground united, and there respectively decaying and germinating.

Such then were some of the most remarkable forms of leaf and foliage, as I was able to observe them in my hasty visit to the fungus-forests of the planet of the sevenfold unity. And having read the description of them, a somewhat dry exposition, I am afraid, the reader will be better able to picture the general effect, which met my eye, as I took a last glance at the singular landscape spreading like a vast ocean all around me. Although the

shades of night were rapidly drawing in the iridescent tints of the forest, where metallic foliaged trees predominated still glowed with the intensity of sunset clouds in a frosty night, the purple masses of the woodland were, it is true, blent with the shadows deepening round the horizon, but the crowns of the higher trees still flashed out, like veritable crowns, in huge masses of burnished bronze or the pink and orange glittering gold of asiatic metal workers. This and the huge masses of metallic-green foliage intensified by contrast the deep purple hue of the sky beyond, which bounded, as it were, the rolling cloud of the woodland and formed the back-ground upon which the glowing tracery of the less distant trees stood out like the arabesque designs of an illuminated mediæval missal, the more gorgeous foliage being bodied forth like groups of brilliant coloured tulips or picotees interspersed with domes and spires of aerial lightness, whose complicated tracery, wrought in honey-coloured amber of liquid transparency, and feathery lightness, was contrasted in all the momentary distinctness of an evanescent dream with the purple back-ground of the sky as the retina of the spectator's eye reflected them a moment, as the iris shifted, attracted as by some magnetic influence to the intenser splendours of the forest's diversified panorama. And above all this bewildering labyrinth of form and colour, rose from time to time, like the disembodied ghosts of the woodland, into the still and silent air, the tall ashen-grey Iggdrasols of its loftier species, dominating with their tall and branching candelabras the gorgeous palpitating life that heaved below them—below their ethereal sprays of lace-like foliage and silvery lancet-leaves. Into the upper stratum of the air, too, rose here and there those vast groups of ivory pilei that looked like groups of Mosques, with their huge domes and cupolas of marble-whiteness, whose bases and lower contours reflected on their surface a shifting kaleidoscope of rainbow tints, where the sinking sunlight shone upon them through the foliage of the lower forest-trees, while

their summits were blanched to the dead-whiteness of a corpse in the first light of the rising moons. Flanking them like minarets wrought in pink and yellow corals, stood the fan-palms of the fungus-forest with their conch-like pilei of feathery lightness, crowned with their ostrich plumes carved in alabaster, veined and rimmed with saffron or purple or suffused as if by the life within them with a celestial blush of the softest pink. Here and there, contrasting with them, stood a detached pagoda top with pendant eaves such as that upon which I sat and, perhaps most striking forms of all, reared on their reticulated foot-stalks like gigantic censers, the gorgeous ewers and salvers of the pezizae stained the deepening purple of the night-heaven with their huge chalices and flower-cups of crimson, orange, emerald, and a still intenser amethyst than the night's itself. Before the final withdrawal of the light I was anxious to see some of the minuter forms of fungal vegetation as they grew in this magic region. I therefore slid down the not very steep slope of the pagoda and peered cautiously over the margin of it. As I have already observed, round the spot above which it grew, there was a sort of clearing and I could see, though not very distinctly, what sort of vegetation here replaced our grasses, flowering herbs and shrubs. The general appearance of the turf did indeed differ from the grass of our lawns much more considerably than did the general form of the forest from what we are so familiar with at home, it consisted of a great variety of what were indeed the equivalents of our moulds felted and hyaline as they are technically called, and looked much as these last appear when seen through the microscope. Never having been exposed to the storms and winds of the upper strata of the air, they had not developed any sort of leaves and being sheltered from the sunlight, they were for the most part of dusky brown or olive green tints. But what caused them to differ most from our common meadow grasses was their tendency to throw out side-branches and also the vitreous.

transparency of very many of their stems, so that the general appearance was that of a bed of some highly dichotomous lichen, or rather a deft imitation of it wrought in glass by a dexterous glass-blower. Amongst all this tangle and confusion of anastomosing branches grew taller stems, tapering from the base to a sharp point and crowned, some with large metallic-looking globes diversified with strange hieroglyphic patterns like those of lizards' scales or the flowers of the common fritillary, some with a steel blue chalice or tankard closed above with a chalk-white lid or operculum. Akin to these were the still larger stemonites and arcyria shrub-like plants, consisting of an intricate net-work or rete mirabile of anastomosing branches. Sometimes the whole of this net-work was a brilliant scarlet colour, sometimes a bright yellow, sometimes brown and sometimes a deep metallic purple. They stood among the tangle of stalks and seeds like miniature cypress-trees or juniper-bushes, only that they were dressed in a less sombre livery. Upright above this tangle of stalks also stood the straight fructifying stems of the general vegetation. At the ends of these were heads of spores in necklace-like strings, radiating from the rounded crown of the stem, while some of the crowns carried a single large spore of a dark brown colour all rough and warty like a certain kind of sugar-plum, others a sort of top-knot of carroway-seeds standing on one end, upright with the concave sides turned innermost, of others the apex was branched or digitate, each finger being prolonged into a string of clear globules about the size and transparency of a snail's egg. The vast variety of forms was at first bewildering, but there was an almost total absence of flower-like forms. There was one exception however. A group of plants, modifications of the parasitic fungus known as cluster cups, which grow on the leaves of the common hawberry and of many other plants. With us they are scarcely the size of a very small pin's head, in the fungus forests they were about the size of a lily, and unlike our

cluster cups, which grow immersed in the substance of the leaf upon which they lie, they developed a foot-stalk some 20 inches or so in height, upon the top of which an umbel or corymb of pedicells carried the brightly tinted calyxes, the edges of which were cut into numerous lobes, resembling the petals of our field flowers, particularly those of some kinds of cress or carrot. These calyxes were white or grey on the outside, the whole of the interior being stained a brilliant scarlet, yellow or purple.

Besides these were some strange looking bodies about the size and shape of custard apples, sessile upon the ground, they were of a purple colour and glass-like consistency, and seemed to consist of a number of hexagonal cells surrounding a hollow interior chamber. I noticed also some gigantic kinds of puff-balls half-buried in the ground opening above by a number of craters like those of some miniature volcano. Creepers too there were of various quaint forms, clothing the stem or hanging from branch to branch of the forest-trees, these, however, I cannot describe, as the light already began to fail and the air to grow so dense and heavy, that together with a sense of satiety fell upon me something of the faintness and exhaustion of the previous evening. With no little difficulty, the sense of oppression was so great, I clomb back to the apex of my pagoda and flung myself on my back with my shoulders against the central umbo and turned my eyes to the horsechestnut-like tree in whose capacious shade, lolling comfortably upon two several branches of it, sat the two Karauthmach who had brought me here, and who silently imbibed the nourishing atmosphere like a couple of bon vivants smoking their havannahs, and from time to time stimulating the flavour of the tobacco with a fragrant sip of carefully compounded whiskey-toddy. They sat there with their eyes half closed and a somewhat foolish simper upon their august visages: were it not that I am loath to impute anything the least savouring of evil or even of undignified to such

stupendous, such majestic beings, I should have been inclined to say slightly inebriated. However this may be, they sat there in a kind of silent ecstasy, gradually sinking like myself, as the evening air became heavier and more impregnated with vapour, into a still deeper state of unconsciousness, trance or coma.

From some unexplained cause or other this effect and the dew-fall occurred later in the vallies than on the plateau, so that we lost consciousness just as the moons had risen, and did not come to ourselves again, until they had already set when a copious and refreshing douche of dew brought us all at once to life again.

Our eyes opened on a scene that seemed a realization of the closing one in Wagner's *Valkyrie*, when Siegfried as a punishment for an adulterous amour is put to sleep for a thousand years, and the messenger of the gods kindles a wall of fire to ring him round and hold him a prisoner, until the period of his probation and punishment is accomplished. The unearthly splendour of the new heaven with its constellations of coloured stars and coloured discs was there above us as it was the previous night, but the glories of the transfigured earth challenged vied with, half eclipsed, and obscured that phantasmagoria of the night-heaven, so that the eye and the bewildered mind turned first to one and then to the others, as if in doubt on which they ought most to fix their attention. How describe, how give any sort of mental picture to the reader of what I saw? The elaborate piling up of phrases would here be worse than useless: yet what other resource is left? How cause to flash upon the reader's mind the apparition that flashed lightening-like upon mine?

There stood the forest and stretched away into illimitable distances, as if it were basking in all the dazzling brightness of a tropic sun at midday—stood out not against a sky steeped in the hot meridian glare of a tropic summer: but hung ensphered in the fathomless abysses

of the purple cupola of the night-heaven. The surprising contrast gave it an appearance or rather impressed one with a sense of its solidity and material reality so deep, as to cause a kind of mental or spiritual revolution. Passion awoke and sated itself in identifying the immaterial with that intoxicating reality, in a furious denial of anything save that all absorbing outwardness, in embodying itself in that transfigured mass and matter, in feeling that transfigured mass and matter to be its true, its innermost core of self—the alpha and omega of all being and all existence. Every leaflet, every branch was painted upon the darkness in its day-time colour (only that the metallic iridescence was gone) by the intense phosphorescence of its inner texture: but the venation and margins of the leaves were traced in luminous lines of intensely bright points of the purest white light.

The whole forest therefore was illuminated, as we illuminate towns and gardens in honour of some victorious general or the birth of a royal son and heir, only that this illumination of nature's contriving bore the same sort of relation to our clumsy pyrotechnic artifices, that the inimitably delicate tissues of nature's handicraft and nature's products seen under the microscope do to the gross fabrics of our looms and spinning jinnies. It was a vision of the infinitely great and the infinitely little revealed in poems and songs of fire. The mind ceased to act in the presence of this two-fold apparition, and the instinct, the institution of the identity of all things, awoke in ecstacy. High above this splendour of the transfigured earth loomed the vast domes in moonlight brilliance, and the ghostly ash-tree forms swayed slowly their feathery crown of luminous silver in the warm current of the night-air, flinging round them showers and cascades of dazzling sparks such as crowd the crest of the ghostly, glimmering waves and surges of a phosphorescent sea.

Not less beautiful were the graceful palm-like species

with their masses of ostrich plumes, steeped in the intense ping glow of the conch-shells of a tropic sea. Standing out against the intenser velvety purple of the night-heaven, they appeared still more shell-like, while bordering the semi-transparent ivory-like pilei, the finely crenellated mantle of some living mollusc seemed to be dimly discernible thinning out and corrugating, as the currents of the life within shifted from side to side or beat now with greater now with feebler pulses of electric force. Like tiny pearlets of pink fire, fell in an equal continuous rain of light the relatively large globular spores of this graceful species, and then rested like millions of diminutive glow-worms upon the broadly spreading foliage of the crest below, but the huge domes and mosques belonged for the most part to a species of black-spored fungi, they, when they first detached themselves from the gills, were invisible, but being produced in great quantities, they clashed together as they fell and as they did so corruscated in sparks and atoms of more than diamond-like brilliancy. But perhaps most wonderful of all were the lotus-like pezizae already alluded to, rising on their tall and gracefully reticulated stems from the rolling sea of fire far beneath: as though they were its final efflorescence. After the heavy dew-fall, which was one of the most remarkable meteorological phenomenon of the planet of the sevenfold unity, the night-air became suddenly extremely dry and, owing to the cauldron-shape of the pezizae's chalices and their somewhat spongy texture, a certain quantity of dew remained at the bottom of the chalice while the walls of its sides were also saturated. As the chalice naturally dried from the rim downwards, its substance gradually became self luminous, first as a ring of orange crimson or purple, as the case might be, until at last the whole of the vast lotus-vase became visible. During this process the substance of the cup contracted throwing off luminous rings, one after the other gradually diminishing in size as they were thrown off from the tapering walls of the

calix, until at last, as the water at the bottom of the cup dried up, they dwindled and dwindled and became no bigger than a child's finger-ring. Owing to the perfect stillness of the night-air, they rose one after the other to being a little smaller than the one above it, the whole an amazing height into the atmosphere, and each ring system gradually assumed the appearance of a gigantic funnel, formed of concentric rings gradually expanding as they sailed into the purple glories of the sky. For a long time they reflected the colour of the peziza-water-lily, from whose chalice they were developed yellow, orange, purple, crimson or snowy white, until at last the topmost rings expanded beyond the cone of coloured light projected heavenwards by the peziza below, slowly drifted across the sky and mingling with similar rings from other pezizas, blended at last into a nebulous haze, that hung above the scene like a faint aerial galaxy or some Magellanic cloud. One after the other they rose, sprang asunder and then blended together in an indistinct haze, as legend melts into fable and fairy lore, tradition into legend, history into tradition and the present into history, the manhood of the individual into the busy life of the present, as the faint nebulous germ of infancy grows into the clearly defined annular rings of boyhood, manhood and old age. Even as the year rings of the Yule-log, of Iggdrasol, the sacred ash-tree of us Scandinavian peoples, were they evolving like the years and æons the mystic tree typifies, evolving before my eyes and then vanishing, as the years evolve and then vanish, and are brought at last to nought. Or perhaps they were like the infinitely small force rings of which modern science tells us matter in reality exists, if these be not rather the point where force and matter coincide in their evolution out of something that is neither one nor the other. Everywhere in the infinitely small, it seemed, as well as in the infinitely great—in the stars and planets and their orbits: the sphere and the circle were the alpha and omega of all existence. And not by any mere

accident, therefore, perhaps was it but moved thereto by some deeply seated instinct, interwoven with the subtlest net-work and mechanism of its nature, that humanity had chosen a ring of gold to be a pledge of human faith, and love and brotherhood, in whose dim circles of emotion we vaguely, perhaps vainly, imagine is prefigured and typified that Something, that transcendent Perfectness of the Atman, of the Pearl of great price. that Unity and Individuality out of which all sprang and into which all must return at last. I have endeavoured to give the reader some faint idea of the wonders revealed in that unearthly illumination, but nothing, I think, brings it home to my own mind so forcibly as the recollection how completely the unearthly splendour of the night-heaven, in that mysterious region of space, with its constellations of many-coloured jewels, its star-clusters of sapphire orbs, or blended rubies and amethysts and all its manifold marvels, were completely eclipsed, masqued, dwarfed, and brought to appear trivial and insignificant in contrast with the nearer glory of the illuminated woodland. Looked at objectively in comparison with the magnificent constellations of infinite space it was a nothing, a mere iota, but it so impressed itself upon the mind and so besieged the imagination, that just as upon earth the near foreground conceals the vaster horizon, and the trivialities of our own insignificant existence make us indifferent to the march of great events and to the ultimate destinies of things beyond ourselves, so it was with me then, I became as it were a part of the throbbing, glowing, phosphorescent world of light and movement and forgot the existence of the mightier firmament beyond. But just as on the previous night the splendours of the night-heaven had ended by rocking my brain into a trance-like sleep, through which dreams symbolical of actual events made me dimly conscious of these events as they were going on around me, so now my brain, wearied by the apparition of that phosphorescent world of living and organic fire, fell asleep and dreamt and, dreaming, awoke

to the consciousness that, what I dreamt, was not so much a dream as a vision of what had been or was or would be. And this is the reality which I dreamt . . .

CHAPTER X

A VISION

I was the sky that saw it all, and again I was the dark moonlit tank with its black water, that reflected what the sky had seen. But only in broken fragments of the pure image of the sky. For the water was flecked with the smooth pattens of the lotus-leaves from among which rose the smooth curving stalks, crowned some with buds, others with efflorescence of flowers, whorls of willow-leaved petals, that glimmered some white, some crimson, some sulphur coloured, some a purple blue, in the silver light of the moon, and in the centre of which trembled the ring of golden stamens, flinging their atoms of golden pollen into the still drowsy air of the summer-night. How still it was. Like a prelude to the dawn of a creation, in which silent, motionless the darkness of the illusion grew into mysterious shapes of unearthly being, that shook from their unfathomed depths the golden atoms which coalesced to form the twofold illusion of material existence. And the sky that saw it all—was that an illusion too? Was there any Essentiality, any Reality at all behind this long procession of subtle Essences—one within another—which the mind of man successively analyzed away into mere nothingness? All round the darkness of the lotus covered Indian tank ran a marble pavement, framing it in a vast oblong: and round the pavement stood endless colonnades of low pillars crowned with lotus capitals, between which sprang deeply scalloped arches that supported a flat roof with a richly carved projecting cornice, giving it some resemblance to a low chinese pagoda. All the wall between the crowns of the scalloped arches and cornice and the spandrels between

consecutive arches was a marvellous labyrinth of intricate geometrical tracery, so fine, that our gothic church-windows, even those of the most elaborate decorative style, appear coarse and commonplace in comparison. Standing out as it did against the deep velvety purple of the Indian summer-sky and the deep black of the forest of pillars, supporting with an endless colonnade the heavy flat corniced marble roof, it resembled rather some rich roll of old point lace exhibited to display the design to the best advantage upon a back-ground of the deepest piled velvet. Three sides of the immense tank were uniform in plan and pattern: the long cornices running into endless perspectives and forming sharp lines of demarcation between the heaven and the earth, occulting the rising and the sinking stars and cutting in two the broad silver shield of the now setting moon. But far away at the further end of the tank, the colonnades and cornices were elevated into a façade some fifty feet in height, above which loomed ghostly and indistinct in the gathering darkness the three cloud-like domes of what had once been a Mohammedan Mosque, but which had by some chance of war or change of dynasty now become a temple of one of the innumerable sects of modern Hinduism. The façade of the temple was formed of a dark red sand-stone and divided into three sections, in each of which the large horse-shoe-shaped arch was now scarcely discernible save that it served to intensify the darkness and add to the illusion of the three domes being suspended between earth and heaven, like hot evening cumulus-clouds, whose bases are flattened out, showing where the surface of the earth heated air is separated from the colder currents of the more rarified atmosphere above. Indeed, to the lively imagination of eastern fancy the dim shadows of the sand-stone façade might have pictured themselves as a medley of cloud-demons and storm-wraiths, sublimating, as they rose further and further away from the pollutions of earth and matter, into the purer and less gross forms of heavenly and

etherial existence. Inch by inch the moon sank lower behind the flat roof of the colonnade and then finally disappeared, fainter and fainter grew the light, one by one the coloured chalices of the lotusses blended with the darkness, still more ghostly loomed the three vast cupolas of the more distant mosque, until at last, as the moon finally set below the horizon of the earth itself, after flickering for a moment as an indistinct haze of a dead white glimmer, even these also disappeared from view and were swallowed up by the night. Scarcely had the moon set, however, when from the other end of the tank came the faint tones of a mandolina and some other twangling instruments, and a few rays of intensely yellow light, ramified diversely among the thick columns of the colonnade, from a point apparently at some distance behind them. Gradually, the light and the sound of the instruments increased, and before very long, a procession, headed by a Brahmin, dressed in a gorgeous religious vestment of embroidered white silk, debouched on to the pavement and proceeded at a slow pace in the direction of the mosque. The priest, a high caste Brahmin about fifty years of age, was a short and rather fat man, with hair that had once been black, but was fast turning to a snowy whiteness. He wore a thick close cropped moustache, but no other hair about a face somewhat heavy and rugged and of a deep olive brown colour. His eyes of an indefinite hazel were round and large, standing out as well as the thick circular folds of the eyelids à fleur de tête under the grisly and irregular growth of eyebrow. His nose was more or less angular or hooked, and the heavy cheeks, with their rounded pommels of flesh meeting the thick heavy moustache in the lower half of the face, were distorted by the dense crop of unyielding bristles into a peculiarly sardonic grin. The goggle eyes with the whites stained a bilious yellow between the iris and the inner corners, contributed not a little with their fixed optimistic leer of self-satisfied priest-craft to render the general expression of the owner

of the visage under consideration far from prepossessing: while the thick lips with the large swollen tongue, that clacked between them like an infant's sated from the teat, enhanced the disagreeable effect of the whole. His Brahmin's cord hung over the left shoulder and his fat yellow hands, lighter in complexion than his olive visage, were spread out before him, the two flexible thumbs turned inwards. In the swollen tongue and the thick lips, in the fat greasy thumbs, in the whole air and demeanour of the man breathed the consciousness of one who is accustomed to handle mysteries, a certain half-suppressed swagger of dogmatic certainty which developes itself out of the practical nature of the rites of all religions, and which sets its stamp upon the individuals of the priestly caste under whatever sky, into whatever religious creed they may be born, whether they sacrifice the body alone as in the African bush, or deform both soul and body as in our English churches and tabernacles. Behind this personage, holding up the skirts of his ample robes, paced two handsome dark-skinned youths, his sons, aged about fourteen and seventeen, respectively: both wore the sacred cord, having both been initiated into the full rights of Brahminism, the younger was also "twice-born", but assisted at the monthly ceremonies only in a minor capacity. Behind them followed some dozen or so of younger boys, some of them perhaps the children of the priest, carrying candles or circular paper-lanterns of crimson tissue printed with various quaint devices, and behind these again, a few women and girls from the neighbouring village. Most of these wore veils of thin transparent muslin and a loose robe of some light sad coloured cotton material: through the veils shone bangles, ear-trinkets and heavy jewelled nose-rings which marred the sunny beauty of the younger women's looks, while horribly distorting the features of those more advanced in years. As the procession emerged from the darkness of the colonnades, and wended slowly along the marble pavement into the

open space between the cornice of the roof and the black waters of the tank, it was possible to observe the group with more precision, and a rapid glance at the fore-heads of the devotees proved at once by the two upright lines of red ochre traced there and uniting in a curve between the eyebrows, that the wearers of this badge or mark were members of some one of the innumerable sects who worship in one or other of his various forms the second person of the Hindoo Trinity, Vishna, the God of Love, of fertility, of life and its preservation, whom in the hour of death, all good Hindoos of whatever sect or denomination invoke under the aspect of his most popular incarnation—that of Rama, showing how deep in all conscious created beings even in the melancholy pessimists of India is that desire for existence, which they yet do all they can to excise as the worst curse of the imprisoned human spirit. But the eyes of anyone accustomed to dwell with more fondness on the beautiful and harmonious in humanity than on what is discordant and grotesque in it, would not have been long in singling out for especial admiration the elder of the two youthful brahmins, whose father at this late hour of the night led the little band of devotees to take part in the monthly ceremonies which celebrated the god, of whose shrine and temple he was the guardian and servant. The ruddy glow of the swinging purple lanterns lit up the clear olive face with its square but ample fore-head, above which the close cropped head of hair gloomed duskily in the dim twilight. A pair of deep brown hazel eyes glittered in the shifting beams of the candles and lanterns with a mingled expression of sweetness and roguishness, not out of keeping with the genial religion of the goodnatured god of birth and procreation, nor did the short piquant little nose by any means detract from the innocent roguishness of the pair of eyes which shone merrily above it. But perhaps the lovely mouth below it most arrested the attention. It was a mouth of perfect sweetness and innocence, a mouth of honey, one might call it, a mouth

like that assigned to Buddha in the best statues and pictures of the Blessed One, a mouth exactly formed on the lines of the graceful bow of Kama, the God of Love, the upper-lip forming two perfect curves from the central line of the face and uniting perfectly at the corners with the straight but beautifully rounded under-lip. How delicately the margin of the upper-lip curled like the pink mantle of some tropic conch-shell, blending perfectly without the smallest crease or puckering with the smooth olive skin of the face. It is only in mouths of this description, formed as it would seem by the outblossoming of an existence in which the gentler passions of the soul, love, mercy and delight alone are represented, that this perfect blending of the surface of the lip and the skin of the rest of the face is to be observed. The extreme opposite type, that of the Irishman and the American Indian, the outgrowth of the destructive spirit in its purest least adulterated form, is thin and dry-lipped and surrounded by a number of radiating clefts or puckers furrowing the jowl, which deepen with age but are never altogether absent. But how flexible, how child-like is Kama's bow mirroring every transient motion of the soul and reflecting in its mobility the heavenly roguishness of the love-lit eyes. Alas! that too often in natures of this type the manifold attractions of earthly existence mar the symmetry in later life, and its honey steals their innate sweetness. In vain, in vain, then. "Er nennt die Güthe, die um schöne Stunden vom Glück getauscht von mir hinweggeschwunden." The pitcher is broken at the fountain, the silver cord is loosened. No more, no more, then the airy spiritual delight of childhood's golden meshed dream of eternal passion, dancing above the fairy ripples of its summer sea, only the thick, cloying dregs of satiety remain, that custom with cracked and quavering voice querulously demands even on the very verge of the grave and of eternity, because it can imagine nothing else.

Slowly the little group proceeded along the marble

margin of the tank, until it reached the further end, then ascended the broad flight of marble steps that led to the three entrances of the quondam mosque, one by one the members that formed this group prostrated themselves before the central archway, and then all slowly and reverently entered the darkened aisles and stood in silent expectation below the vast shadowy cupola which covered the middle of the sacred edifice. Before the group of worshippers at the north-eastern end of the temple rose a tall and graceful lancet-arch, the apex of which almost reached the roof of the building. This arch was flanked and partly supported on each side by square pilasters, while the margin of the bow above was cut into numerous fine scallopings, the points of the moulding between two contiguous scallops being crowned with a richly carved crochet or fineal. Some twenty feet beyond this arch was another, resembling it, the wall between was embayed and vaulted above, the top of the two double arches as they are technically called being connected by a mid-rib of stone from which sprang the spans or ogives of the interjacent vaulting. Before the second arch hung a gorgeous curtain covered with arabesque designs, representing apes and peacocks, worked in blue and purple silk and gold and silver thread. The "eyes" of the peacock's tail feathers were formed of thin plates of steel finely engraved, to represent the top lunules of the feathers, and were then tempered or chemically oxydized, by some process unknown to western art to imitate the brilliant metallic colouring of the ocellations.

Leaving the little crowd of worshippers outside the first of these two arches, the Brahmin, followed by his elder son, passed across the interspace between the first and second arch, and lifting the curtain with an important, half theatrical gesture, like that of a clergyman baptising a child and signing it with the sign of the cross in the full conviction that he is performing a ceremony fraught with consequence of infinite seriousness to the welfare of the little monkey squalling in his arms, and beckoning

to his son to follow him, entered the dark and mysterious precincts of the Idol's shrine. The heavy folds of the curtain dropped into their place again, and a hush of awed expectation fell upon the little congregation. Then at last the strain upon their attention coupled with the dusty atmosphere of the seldom opened shrine had the effect of irritating the sensitive mucous membrane of the older women and, as generally happens at any solemn climax in our own religious performances—the elevation of the Host for instance in Catholic or the exordium of the Sermon in Protestant Churches, a series of spasmodic coughs broke the too religious silence, like muffled minute guns or the deprecating yelps of a small dog, whose bone has been incontinently seized by some canine Barbarossa, and whose plaintif protests sound fainter and fainter, more few and far between, as he trots off agrieved, his indignant stump of a tail safely ensconced (as if it too was taking shelter) between a prudently expeditious pair of hind legs.

At last a bell was heard to ring somewhere behind the shrine of the god, and at this signal the worshippers approached within the first arch and seated themselves on several benches or *Prie-dieux*, arranged in front of the curtain, which still veiled the precincts of the shrine and the sacred image of the Deity. Here the fits of coughing were not for the present repeated, partly perhaps because they had exhausted themselves, partly, also, because in the kind of alcove in which the people now sat, were several objects well calculated to arrest the attention of a devotee. The lamp of crimson glass which hung from the mid-rib of the vaulting, as if in obedience to some hidden impulse, conveyed to it in the tones of the bell, suddenly glowed with an intenser light, and it was possible to discern ranged round this vestibule to the inner holy of holies, the vaulted space, I mean, in which the congregation was now seated, a number of groups of sculpture, executed in a kind of greenish Jade or soapstone, and arranged round the walls of the vestibule at

equal distances from one another, much as the stations of the cross are arranged round the aisles of a Catholic Church. They represented the successive incarnations of Vishnu, the symbolical mode in which the sages of the East have for ages popularized the doctrine of evolution and the vast antiquity of the world we inhabit, for the intuitive wisdom of the Eastern world, fortified perhaps by some dim indistinct traditions handed down for countless generations as religious mysteries, had long ago hit upon the fundamental truths of Darwinism, though it was reserved in the fulness of time for the great Kentish Naturalist to demonstrate them scientifically. First of all by the outer arch near the wall on the left hand side of the congregation stood a Dagon-statue, representing the first avatar of Vishnu, the Matsya or fish avatar, that is, to generalize what was here symbolized in a concrete form, the first evolution of life by the creative powers of nature in the primitive ocean which succeeded chaos. On the right wall and a little farther from the outer arch than this statue stood a second, consisting of a finely carved figure of Vishnu standing upon a tortoise, no less skilfully designed and carved: this was the Kurma or tortoise avatar, when, on the emergence of land out of the waste of waters aquatic forms, were little by little fitted to live and flourish upon atolls, islands and continents. Then on the left wall, and still further from the outer arch than the second statue, was one in which Vishnu was represented with the head of a boar, the Varaha avatar, typical of the third Kalpa or Tertiary epoch, when low forms of marsupial and snouted animals were for the first time evolved. The fourth avatar was represented on the right hand wall, by the statue of a well-formed and good-looking dwarf, when Vishnu, in the golden age of the world, became incarnate as a humanity, developed out of some pure, untainted, fruit-eating animal: most likely some form intermediate between lemurs and a primitive opossum-like marsupial. For like our dicotyledonous forest-trees, which have been

developed out of herbacious and shrub-like beginnings, the first humanity evolved, in the primitive ages of the world, at least according to the Indian and profounder theory of evolution, was diminutive in size and of child-like loveliness and this explains how it is that our children at the present day are more beautiful and more delicately formed than adults. The young chimpanzee begins life like a wizened faced old man, and if the western theory of evolution is exactly true, our children should in childhood be diminutive patterns of the primitive "missing link", from which our race is descended, for embryologists tell us, that our birth is an epitome of humanity's evolution and Darwinism tells us, that the missing link was an extremely unpleasant-looking being having a hairy face and body, pointed ears, low brow and prognathous jowl. Now it is in old age and not in childhood that human beings tend to exhibit this type of being, if they do at all: thus the beauty and delicacy of our children offers a problem, which the Western evolutionist is as yet quite unable to solve, and which presents one of the most serious stumbling blocks to the general acceptance of his system. It is, however, perfectly explained by the fourth and fifth avatars of the creed or philosophy of Vaishnavism. For after the Vamana avatar, behold on the left hand wall an awful statue representing the terrible Nara-sinha or Man-Lion Avatar—Vishnu's fifth incarnation—an awful gorilla-like loup-garou with huge canines. He is seated. And across his knees is stretched a human corpse, which he has rent and is disembowelling with eager fingers. This is the "missing link". The second humanity evolved. Our race is the result of the blending of the two primal humans: the Vamana or children of light with the ferocious Man-Lions or sons of darkness. Following this mysterious horror of the deep abyss of past æons, comes on the right hand wall—the sixth avatar: the Parasurama Avatar or Vishnu with the axe corresponding with the Palæolithic and Neolithic epochs, on the left wall a statue with the bow or the

Bala Avatar representing the Bronze and Iron age and forming the seventh avatar: and last of all close to the inner arch with its gorgeous tapestry on the wall to the right stood a noble statue of Buddha, the Sakya Muni Avatar, Buddha with the bow-like mouth of ineffable sweetness and the light of a divine unearthly wisdom beaming from his noble fore-head. Such was the series of avatars accepted by the sect of Vaishnavists who worshipped in the temple I am describing, but I ought to say, that some sects recognise other avatars after the Parasurama Avatar: such, for instance, as the Plough Avatar: representing the epoch of the discovery of ploughing, when humanity ceased to consist of tribes of savage nomads perpetually at war with one another, and settled down in primitive families or communities to the arts of peace, of commerce and agriculture. Others again interpolate a certain Chandra or Moon Avatar and there are various other amplifications of the later avatars due to the deification of actual human beings. Thus in the case of the Chandra Avatar, the hero of the legendary incarnation, was most likely a member of the princely family which, with more than Roman pride, traces its descent back to a heavenly origin, to no less a being, in fact, than Chandra, the moon.

And lastly, there are in India at the present day certain pessimistic Indian Swifts who believe that the incarnations of Vishnu have by no means come to an end, but that in the next Kalpa, or age of the world Vishnu, disgusted with the human Yahoo, (let our lovers of horse-flesh and racing-men note it well), will finally become incarnate in a noble thorough-bred and crown existence with the horse Avatar. But to the ordinary throng of worshippers it was not given to look much beyond the symbols themselves or, at least, these last only conveyed to the minds that perused them a shadowy indistinct notion of some transcendent mystery beyond. Some of the most devout among the worshippers were indeed provided with rosaries and fixed their eyes on one of the eight jade-

statues, telling a bead at each and repeating the words Om, Om, Om, over and over again, or saying to themselves the brief Indian credo or formula "God is one, he is everlasting, everlasting without beginning and without end". But gradually even these external signs of devotion ceased and a hush of expectation settled upon the whole congregation as from time to time behind the curtain lights were seen to move to and fro, and now and then a musical instrument gave a plaintive wail as its owner tightened a string or turned a screw. Hereupon the younger son of the Brahmin, who sat with the village boys forming the choir, gave them a sign and they passed by a door in the left wall of the alcove and through a passage to the back of the shrine from which a mixed sound of chanting and chattering was soon after heard to issue, then the chattering subsided and the chanting predominated, became more measured and less inharmonious, the instruments forwent their strident interjections and chimed in with voices in some sort of accompaniment, and at the same time it became evident from the steady increase of the light behind the curtain, that the shrine and altar of the god were being illuminated. At last the bell again sounded and amidst a flourish of musical instruments and the utterances, half suppressed, of religious phrases and the sacred word "Om" by the crowd of worshippers roused and stimulated by their long period of expectation in the semi-darkness of the vast cupolas of the mosque, the curtain was suddenly drawn aside and displayed to the eager upturned eyes of the enraptured crowd a view of the inner splendours of the shrine and of the statue of the God. Like the worship of the host in the Catholic Church the worship of Vishnu is purely idolatrous. He is supposed to be in a special and mysterious sense present in his image in the same way that Christ is supposed to be present in the innumerable pyxes and ciboria that contain his oven-made body. Not that the image is considered as a fetish but rather as a kind of vehicle through which the faithful are put into com-

munication with the great god himself, who is in his essence, as conceived by Hindoos, every whit as spiritual a being as the God of the Christians or Mahommedans. But a finely sculptured representation of the Deity is supposed to place his worshippers in closer "rapport" with his Godhead than a work of inferior design and execution, and it must be admitted that very similar notions are firmly fixed in all admirers of Christian religious art, who, therefore, however little sympathy they may feel with Hindoo systems of philosophy and religion, would do well to reflect, before dismissing with a contemptuous sneer, as a mass of idolatry and superstition, the complicated fabric of Hinduism, how strictly the ideas of the orthodox public of the great Asiatic peninsula are in conformity with their own in this respect. The noble image which was now revealed to his Vaishnavist worshippers was at all events admirably designed to awaken those mysterious sentiments at once material and spiritual that are supposed to be especially subject to his control if they are not rather types and semblances of that substratum, that Essentiality, that One Being, out of which the whole Phenomenal Creation has been evolved as if in sportive jest, and into which it is destined to return. And the deep breathless silence of the crowd of worshippers conveyed more truly an idea of the effect produced upon the spectator by the majestic figure and strange symbolism of the sublime image of the God, than any loud outburst of admiration and religious enthusiasm would have done. The walls of the recess behind the curtain for about six feet of their height were plated with pure gold beaten laminæ and inlaid with agates and precious stones representing peacock's feathers and the four sacred symbols of the God. Various lamps suspended from the ceiling of the recess hung at about the same distance from the ground and were so arranged and constructed as to throw their light downwards in a steady blaze of light vaulted below the upper darkness, so that all the rest of the lofty Mahommedan arch above them

was buried in the deepest obscurity. To add to their effect numerous other lamps and candles were placed on the floor or fixed in sconces and sockets rivetted into the ground. These lit up the whole interior of the shrine with a blaze of light. In the middle of this shrine was a low couch of aventurine of a pale yellow colour, carved to imitate a couch of silk with silken pillows whereon the god reclined; the pillows seemed to be dented with his weight (so skilfully had the sculptor executed his work) and were bordered by a thick silken cord (also carved in aventurine) while at the corners of the pillow hung four large tassels of the same, the finer cording which formed these tassels being also carved out of the solid block with scrupulous fidelity. Wrought in some kind of black and yellow jasper an immense canopy of eleven cobra's heads reared itself about five feet above the head of the couch and partially overshadowed it, the diamond eyes and tongues of moon-stone flashing and flickering in the light of the lamps and candles, as if to protect the image from the possibility of desecration. And on the couch itself rested the statue of Vishnu. It was rather above life-size and was carved out of a single flawless block of some kind of perfectly homogenous greenish-blue marble. The figure was naked save for an embroidered cloth of white silk thrown round the loins and reclined in an attitude of luxurious indolence and divine repose upon its marble divan. The limbs, face and body were full, the contours rounded and graceful almost inclining to fatness, so that the form of the muscles was not perceptible, the face was perfectly smooth without any trace of hair about it, the lips full and inviting, formed of a homogeneous kind of jasper. The hair was black, the brows square, the eyebrows delicately traced, the nose short and straight, while the eyes themselves were formed of liquid pearl-like moon-stone and the two irids of coal black diamonds cut into a wedge shape, the points of which just touched the middle of the margin of the lower eyelids. This gave a peculiar expression to the eyes,

they seemed to eat into, to eat away the very soul, replacing it by a vague passion half material, half spiritual, drugging, cloying the fancy as with an opiate, sensuous with a certain taint of earthliness that rendered the strange charm in them all the more irresistible. The mind collapsed before them weak and fascinated like a bird that has been fixed by the eyes of a serpent and flutters down from twig to twig that it may lavish its whole life and being in the rapture and agony of that dreaded, yet desired death-struggle. And if the effect of the face upon the spectator was mysterious and fascinating, not less mystifying and surprising was the rest of the symbolism of the statue. So symmetrically were they placed upon the shoulders that one did not notice it at first, but as a matter of fact the statue was four-armed, grasping in each of the four hands one of the four symbols sacred to Vishnu, in the two right hands the figure held the lotus-flower and the ring, in the left pair the conch and the hammer or sceptre, a mysterious instrument resembling a key or the famous hammer of Thor, one of our own Scandinavian deities: But what perhaps most arrested the attention was a long curving stalk which issued from the navel of the god to about the height of two feet and supported on its upper extremity a large half opened lotus-flower carved in red chalcedony from the flower-cup of which emerged a four-headed or, perhaps I should rather say, a four-faced effigy of Brahma carved out of a single magnificent opal. This singular device strangely arrested the attention and stirred the speculative faculties of the mind. Most likely the sculptor intended to convey by it, the esoteric belief of many worshippers of Vishnu that their god, the God of Love, of organic creation and of preservation, is identical with the impersonal God, Brahma- the one substance or existence underlying everything, in which all orthodox Hindoos believe, although no temples are raised to an Abstraction whose existence is too far removed from human ideas of being to become the object of sacrifice and ritual. In this rehabilitated

Moslem temple, then, Vishnu, the God of Love, was worshipped as the ultimate essence out of whose lower parts Brahma, the lotus-flower of material existence of universes, of animate nature and of human civilisations in their totality, has been evolved. A noble conception, sublimely symbolized (whether truth or falsehood) by a creation of the imagination which took the reason by storm and held the passions spell-bound. In the presence of that all too eloquent silence the heart assented whether it would or not. And if the sculptor had externalized his thought in a word of power, the outcome of a life's devotion to one engrossing theme, and if that word of power, the sculptured marble, spoke so eloquently even to the unlettered throng separated from the image by a dusky interspace of light and shade, the reader may imagine how powerful an effect its presence must have had, upon the young Brahmin novice who now for the first time assisted intimately in the rites performed at its shrine. Not that the rites themselves were of a kind particularly to stir the imagination. From a sacerdotal point of view it is an immense advantage to have your god or idol in a portable form. When he is so as in the host contained in the pyx or ciborium, the priest has the immense advantage of being able to manipulate him and thus to convey to the unthinking and more ignorant part of his congregation the notion that somehow or other he, the priest, is superior to the material object adored, indeed to the believers in transubstantiation the priest is essential to the transformation of an ordinary piece of baked bread into a fetish-substance susceptible of being adored and bowed down to with advantage by the faithful. And how remarkably astute it was of the Romish Church to choose a piece of bread to worship.—How deep a knowledge of humanity and of human nature they displayed in the choice the following reflection will suggest. The Useful and the Necessary have ever been the stablest of popular deities and the longest held in reverence. A piece of bread therefore possesses all the advantages of

the sacred Cow of the Hindoos for a god or fetish with this supreme one superadded that it is portable and easily manipulated by the officiating sacerdotos. But when the Idol as in the temple of Vishnu I am describing is a sublime work of art which reveals its own Evangel, the priest is of necessity reduced to be merely the minister of the god, and the ritual from being an imposing process of god-making to a simple act of homage and of rendering services to the Deity through and by means of his material image. It was not, therefore, the ritual that wrought to an agony of passionate desire which again seemed to dissolve away into a trance of religious ecstacy, the whole being of the beautiful young Brahmin. This ritual had its antiphones and chants—like those of modern Rome, melancholy to ordinary untrained ears from the subtle sequences of semi-tones and minor intervals out of which they were built up, it had its incense of sandal wood and rich aromatic spices, it even had its sacrifice, rice-balls, and small heaps of ghee and clarified butter placed on betel leaves, which were then burnt on salvers, so that Agni, the sacred messenger of the Gods, might carry them in their subtilized bodies, their linga—sarira—to the God in his subtilized body that in that he might have nourishment: but unlike the Romish ceremonial they led up to no skilfully and dramatically contrived climax, when the candles are lighted on the altar, and the bell made to vibrate in solemn tones from outside the church, and the priest triumphantly amidst a blaze of light raises the pyx aloft that contains the sacred elements, and the congregation feels that by his and their efforts combined but mostly by the peculiar powers with which he, a consecrated priest, is endowed, through the mystery of the Apostolical succession, a miracle has been performed and a worshipped god has been evolved that can be beneficially bowed down to and adored. Nothing of all this was to be found in the Hindoo ritual of the sect with which we are occupied at present. It was simply an elaboration of the primitive savage fetish-worshippers'

gross conception of an anthropomorphic and hungry god who will be made complaisant and amenable to reason by means of a good dinner. Nor were the changing of the embroidered loin-cloth nor the reverent scourings and lavations of the idol's body (the washings and accretions were religiously swallowed by the choir boys, one of whom choked and had to be patted on the back by the base violin to get the sanctified scrapings to go the right way) much calculated to arouse religious enthusiasm. And yet one operation there was which strangely stirred the mind and heart of the young novice. When his father beckoned to him to bring the golden vase containing the red ochraceous earth and hold it in readiness in one hand while with the other he kept a crystal lamp raised to illuminate the eyes and fore-head of the god, when he felt the mysterious gaze of those moon-stone eyes fixed upon himself and saw the coal black irids flash and sparkle as if they were endued with a sort of unearthly vitality, when the ring in the god's right hand caught the light, and the lotus of chalcedony on its stem of transparent aquamarine also glowed as though the blood of a new creation were circling in its veins, and when lastly the opal figure of the four-headed Brahma clothed itself for a brief instant in evanescent rainbow-tints, melancholy types of the transitoriness of all earthly existence, then the heart of the young man beat passionately and fiery as though a new life was awakening within him, the mighty music of the hymns of the Rig Veda seemed to be rolling in his ears, and a frenzied delirious desire possessed his whole inner being and shook him like an aspen, so that the very pulses of his physical body seemed to dissolve away in a trance of delicious agony, the wild and premature desire of love and knowledge to penetrate the truth of all things. Then his father took a pinch of the red earth out of the vase by means of the nail of the little finger of his left hand (it was allowed to grow to an extraordinary length for the purpose) stencilled with this ochraceous earth the horse-shoe

shaped symbol on the fore-head of the god between the eyebrows, and the ceremony was at an end. The curtain remained drawn for a while that the congregation might take a last farewell-look at the god while the choir boys and musicians were shuffling off: then only the Brahmin and his eldest son were left in the shrine, the curtain fell and the lights were one by one extinguished: all save a pendant of red crystal which was always kept burning above the image. The beam, however, which penetrated the ruddy substance of the crystal rather served to intensify the gloom around it than to throw any light upon the objects treasured in the sanctuary: only that the outlines of the god were just discernible as soon as the eye had grown accustomed to the darkness, and from time to time the ruby flower-cup of the lotus and the four-headed figure cut in opal glimmered with an unearthly light like the last faint glow of an expiring sun or the pallid iridescence of a rainbow reflected from a mist of rain freezing and condensing into hoar-frost. Sometimes a flash, too, seemed to come from the diamond eyes and suffuse itself for an instant over the moon-stone whites, and as the lamp flickered for an instant the four arms seemed to move mysteriously in the darkness, the pink of the shell to flush for an instant: the ring to revolve between the supple fingers: the key or hammer to tremble as if some secret emotion or some passionate desire, had caused the marble nerves of the idol to quicken and vibrate. The Brahmin did not linger long in this chiaroscuro, but beckoned his son, raised a corner of the curtain and joined the rest of the worshippers, among whom the choir-boys and musician were also seated. Headed by the priest all now retired from the temple the way they came, took up their lanterns and candles which they had extinguished and left by the horse-shoe entrance on the top of the flight of steps, and without rekindling them, for the light was already breaking in the East, formed into an irregular procession and filed at a slow pace

along the dewy pavement that flanked the eastern side of the lotus covered tank.

And behold! I was Varuna, the dawn. The sky was indeed the Seer but Varuna was the Seeing. Like the love of a child the light stole over the eastern sky, suffusing it with a pale transparent yellow pure as the undied silken robe of the Blessed One who taught the Way of Life and the Four Great Truths. A few stars still lingered in the west, while to the north the huge cloud-like edifice loomed ghostly and indistinct through the veil of dews that trembled with desire as they felt the light and heat of dawning. Soon their dread and their desire would come upon them, the fierce heat of the sun would seize them, rend them as the tiger rends the kid, and the vast interspace of sky and air would devour them. They would be no more. But as yet they tarried on the cool earth. Like a thin veil of the finest lawn they spread themselves over the pavement that ran all round the tank, so that the bare feet and the sandals as they brushed the frosted marble grew chilly and left where they dropped a moist and dark impression of themselves upon the pavement. Silvery dew-drops rested on the broad leaves of the lotusses or hung above the opening calyxes: a breath of air fluttered under the cornices and among the pillars of the colonnades as though it had lost its way, and even in the hearts of the worshippers as they wended homeward to resume their monotonous unexhilarating round of trivial duties and nature imposed drudgery, the remembrance of the image of their god and the vague passionate yearning and aspirations with which its presence had inspired them itself deepened and intensified like the dawning hope of better things, into a spiritual light, advancing step by step as if in some subtle harmony and correspondence with the dawning light of external nature. But now little by little the band of devotees thinned off—the choir-boys and the musicians loitered among the colonnades, while the rest of the congregation also dispersed in the same direction

and crossing to the outside of the open gallery which surrounded the tank took various paths among the fields of rice and maize and thus reached the scattered homesteads which formed the neighbouring hamlet. The priest and his eldest son were therefore left to pursue their way alone (for the younger of the two youthful Brahmins had run off to play with the other choir-boys: a rare privilege accorded only by certain of the more liberal Vaishnavists sects on religious holidays when the strict regulations of caste distinction were relaxed sometimes indeed for a time completely cancelled). The father had hung his vestments across his arm and was sauntering along with an expression of unctuous self-satisfaction about his puffy face: his son paced dutifully along beside him listening to the words of inspired wisdom that dropped from his fat lips. A beautiful picture of filial and paternal devotion, truly, at all events of filial. Nothing is more strongly inculcated by all sects of Hindoos than the sacredness of the family-tie. In strong contrast with the Christian religion, at least as taught in the gospels, is the familism and family worship of Hindustan. Christ, both in his practice and precept, showed slight respect to the idea of the sacredness of family life, according to his exacting creed and its jealous love, he that hated not father and mother for the sake of an idea was not worthy of the Kingdom of Heaven promised to the more thorough-going proselyte to that idea for which everything earthly was to be sacrificed. "He that hateth his father is mad" says the Hindoo proverb, and our modern civilisation with its precious heirloom of religious faith and tradition will not be slow to perceive which of these two maxims harmonizes most clearly with its own practice and moral teaching, corresponds most closely with its innermost needs and holiest aspirations, ensures most thoroughly that steady progression from age to age, and that social stability and general well-being without which any progress and any amelioration of our lot on earth is an impossibility. A

great lesson truly, this sublime domestic priesthood of Brahmanism brings home to us with its uncompromising discipline well-ordered domestic love, and subordination of the younger to the wiser and older generation:—a lesson which I trust the sequel will illustrate and bring home to the most careless of my readers, aye burn into their hearts and consciences as if it were written on a sacred scroll, inscribed and illuminated in letters of fire. But to resume: Father and son had been walking along in silence for the last few minutes and had nearly reached the southern end of the tank, the son ruminating with wonder upon the mysterious effigy of the god in whose shrine he had been helping to officiate, the father's mind perhaps occupied by thoughts of a vaster yet more mysterious character, when the attention of the latter personage was attracted by a fat tench which was basking on the top of the water near the flower-cup of a beautiful sulphur colored lotus and he stopped to observe it. If the tench could have read the Brahmin's thoughts at this moment they would probably have caused it no little trepidation, for they had in obedience to the object on which they were fixed suddenly assumed a gastronomic complexion, and had all at once exchanged the mystery of esoteric speculation (as a subject for contemplation for the more practical one of how to noose your horse hair to the best advantage, and whether Limericks or Kendals are most sure to hook your fish, and what sort of bait is likely to be most killing (the niceties of modern fishing tackle, be it observed, thanks to free trade and the presence of the British Government in India, had reached even this benighted Hindoo). "Of course it is all Illusion", said the Hindoo to himself, for some philosophical exculpation of these excursions of the fancy seemed to be necessary, "but after all, do not the Puranas themselves bid us after having recognised the Illusiveness of everything to treat it as though it were a reality and possessed of a substantial existence and attributes? Of course, as a matter of fact, I am a mere Illusion, so is

the tank, this water and this tench, but a sportive jest it will be, just by way of a joke, to assume that we are all realities, sniggle this tench out with a horse-hair line and make a good dish of kedgerees out of him." In accordance then, with the dictates of the Puranas, the Brahmin proceeded to occupy himself with various reflections and observations of a highly practical kind, observations and reflections, be it noted, which took a considerable time for their complete elaboration, and which necessitated an intense concentration of the attention and faculties upon the tench, the lotus-flower and the dark disc of water which surrounded them, so that, when, having arranged in his mind his plan of campaign, the Brahmin crept off (as much as his corpulence would permit on tiptoe, not to disturb the present object of his devotion) in order to fetch his tackle, he was not surprised to see that the day had already dawned and that his own young hopeful had disappeared. "The young rascal", he said to himself with a wheezy chuckle, not sorry to think that the tank and the fish would now certainly be left in repose until his own return, shuffled off to the end of the colonnades and vanished among the pillars. Having thus disposed of the Brahmin and the rest of the congregation, it behoves us to see what had become of the young mystic on whom the shrine and its symbolism had already wrought so powerful an effect. I say already, for a believer would certainly ascribe what followed to the present influence of the god and, indeed, all religions have a tendency to develop apparent proofs of themselves in practical life, proofs which convince the practical mind because it never seriously attempts to trace the sequence of causes and effects more than two or three links at most backwards towards their origin: the acceptance of a creed by a large body of human beings implies the preparation, so to say, of a sort of spiritual and social magnetic field, and as social events have their origin in the human units that compose the society and these units act in accordance with the ideas to which

they have been brought up, it follows that any system of religious or unreligious thought will develop apparent proofs of itself in the society which accepts the system. How much more is this likely to be the case when the creed, as in the case of Vaishnavism, appeals directly to the most powerful and the most absorbing of all the passions of the soul, that passion which seems to be and perhaps is the mainspring of all the rest, one therefore on which a great part of human activity directly or indirectly depends, and which is so intimately connected with the very existence of organic beings and their perpetuation in time and space. However this may be, the young Indian had sauntered along so deeply immersed in thought as to be quite unaware that his respectable father was no longer at his side. How wonderful it all is, he was thinking to himself, this crystal universe with its infinite series of Kalpas, and incarnations circling on world without end, like those mathematical series in which after innumerable terms the original term crops up again, and the whole thing repeats itself over and over again: or perhaps like those still more mysterious ones in which after a certain point is reached another series is developed which again at another definite point develops a third and so on, for all eternity. And again, how wonderful in their mere semblances these infinite hosts of giant suns and worlds: developing infinite series of forms and sizes according to the distances from which they are seen, and at definite distances changing suddenly to the eye that perceives them from one series to another, first from a faint nebulous mist to sparks and points of light then to the appearance of luminous discs, then to cloud-enveloped spheres and globes, and last to surfaces covered with an infinite diversity of animate and inanimate forms which the eye can only take in by shifting from point to point of the huge orb. It was just as those mathematical series changed. How strange too, to think, that this series of appearances, manifest to the eye, as it gauged the star depths with the aid of the telescope and the

microscope, should tally so closely with what science taught had been the series of transformations through which planets fitted to be the homes of living beings had been evolved. For the nebula, it was said, had condensed to points of light, these to whirling discs, these to globes of fire which as they cooled had evolved upon their surfaces those æons of ever changing life, manifestations of which the sculptured representations of the Blessed Vishnu's incarnations were a sort of brief epitome in symbolic form. And then these lotus-blossoms rearing their graceful heads above the dark blue water of the sacred tank just as the beryl lotus containing the four-headed opal Brahma drew itself forth from the inmost vitals of the dark blue body of that mysterious deity in the shrine, how they carried the symbolism of the sculptured god into the realms of living nature, multiplying it a hundredfold and leading one to divine that the inner principle which caused the lotus to emerge above the waters on its curving flower-stem was something which had its origin in the body of Vishnu himself. And where was that all? Was it the Universe? No. For that visible Universe was according to the symbolism of the sacred image the very thing that was evolved out of the body of Vishnu, the ultimate Essence, the Impersonality. — — How far these reflections would have led our hero, I cannot say, for at this moment, they were banished or transfigured I hardly know which to call it, by an apparition that seemed to be an answer to them sent by the direct intervention of Vishnu himself. A wall of loose stones ran round the sacred tank separating the colonnade from the rice-fields: but this was gapped and broken down in many places: indeed, the universal reverence felt by the people for the Deity was a sufficient protection both for his shrine and for its precincts: the wall therefore which had been built shortly after the transformation of the Mosque into a Hindoo temple, lest some fanatic Moslem might be tempted to commit an outrage upon the image, had been allowed to fall into decay, thus, as the young

Brahmin walked along the tank he was brought into line with one of these openings, a fact that revealed itself by a strong flood of light from the now fully risen sun, whose warm rays streamed in a broad pathway across the pavement of the colonnade. And leaning against one of the inner columns that supported the cornice and the perforated tracery, as though wafted there by the sunlight or condensed out of airy nothingness by the alchemy of its magic rays stood a vision of delight that might have been one of those shepherdesses with whom Vishnu in his beloved incarnation of Rama had loved to sport, or it might have been Lakshmi or Sri herself, goddess of beauty, who sprang from the froth of the ocean when churned by gods and demons, the Venus Anadyomene of the Eastern world, the spiritualized consort of the Blessed Vishnu in his most transcendental and least human form. Or it might have been one of the Peris whom kindred Persian mystics believe in: the young Brahmin's mind had recourse to this simile for, sooth to say, his own creed dealt rather in grotesque than graceful imagery and symbolism. Whether Peri or mythic shepherdess or better still living flesh and blood, the vision leant against one of the lotus crowned pillars and glanced at Vishnu's worshipper with a very human pair of eyes: agate eyes with irids of brown moss-agate, that matched the delicately pencilled eye-brows and the long curving lashes that fringed the blue veined eyelids. Beautifully oval was the wonderfully fair face of a transparent amber complexion, wonderfully shell-like the elegant little nose, beautifully curved the coral lips, wonderfully soft the cream-like neck and exquisitely white the lovely bosom, firm and rose-tipped like a boy's, but this was hidden by a scarf of honey coloured undyed silk which was folded across the breast and then tied in a girdle round the delicate waist. Her arms were bare, in one hand that drooped by her side she held a yellow lotus, with the other which was raised above her head she was toying with a straw that hung from a weaver

bird's nest suspended above the capital of the column: a light pair of white turkish trousers completed her costume, her bare feet of ivory whiteness like the diminutive hands were crossed and the point of one of the red and gold embroidered sandals tapped the marble of the pavement coquettishly as if to attract attention. Love in Eastern climates requires no three volume novels for its elaboration: it is as rapid and deadly as the tropic lightening flash, as sudden in the havoc it works as the hurricanes and inundations that wreck a continent in the space of three minutes and a half. There the victims of love's madness plunge into a veritable heaven at the experience of the divine emotion and fall sick and die if the object of it is too suddenly removed. In this case between thought and action there was not the finest razor's edge of separation. She was the incarnation of that with which his spirit had been linked all through its previous existence in their infinite series of metempsychoses, upward and downward now bestial, now human, now divine, backward into the infinite abyss of past time where like two glittering dew-drops, two shining points of light they ran together and coalescèd in that essential unity which was without beginning, without end, without personality, an abstraction too remote for the heart of man to grasp or realize. All this flashed through the young Brahmin's mind with the rapidity of lightening, leaving there in the ecstasy of a living objective present passion, the sense of some eternal loss, like the undefined half grasped feeling of something awry, experienced by the patient after an operation under anaesthetics as he slowly recovers consciousness and struggles back again into the expanded world. Not in the most solemn or the most exciting crises of his life does the Hindoo's inveterate habit of philosophising altogether leave him, he always preserves sufficient self-possession and self-consciousness to look at what he is experiencing objectively—as was illustrated at an execution in Calcutta one day when a hitch occurred and

the victim of civilisation's panacea for improving morality all the world over, with a bow of the most perfect politeness, and a benevolent desire to put everyone at his ease in spite of the unpleasant little incident, blandly remarked with just the slightest tone of deprecation in his voice:—"Sahib, the rope's broke." But in the present instance the faint shadow of a sigh, the indefinable sense of something wrong conjured up by philosophy's analytic hair-splitting blending as it did with all the vague mysticism of the shrine and of the image of Vishnu so lately worshipped, rather intensified the thrill of earthly sensuous delight than it detracted anything from its overwhelming power. In an instant the lovely boy was at her side, his arm was round her waist, hers round his, they thridded the broad illuminated pathway of the sunlight, like the heart of its desire through the colonnade and into the fields of rice and maize, as if they had been one for all eternity, and it was only out of the divine sunlight in the shade of earth-built temples and exhalations that they had been as it were for one painful uneasy instant separated. The sun rose higher and now even the cool shadowy tank opened out as it were into another state of being: the dread and desire of the dew-drops had come to pass: they were all volatilized by the sun's increasing heat: the pavement was dry and thirsty: where the footprints upon it had fallen dark in their groundwork of frosted arabesques were only slight stains of ochraceous earth, the crimson cones of the half opened lotus-flowers expanded to the light, the particles suspended in the water glittered like spangles of gold and silver and even the tench oaring itself lazily by the sulphur coloured lotus-flower, glowed like burnished bronze and began to think of those delicious morsels of paste and honey which his good brother the Brahmin was wont to throw to himself and his finny companions of the tank. The tench had enjoyed many of them himself: true, occasionally they had the unpleasant property of lifting the individual who indulged in them out of the cool lotus covered water on

to the dry unnavigable earth, but that according to our scaly philosopher was owing to some unadroitness in his brethren, the tench, for which his good brother the Brahmin was not responsible, he would show them how the thing should be done. And the opportunity was not slow to present itself, for a slight vibration of the surface of the water indicated the fact, that the Brahmin, having carefully prepared his tackle and baited his hook, was now approaching the spot from which he had first observed the tench. Meanwhile, outside, careless of fate and destiny, saturated with the breath of the divinity, the cornfields and the highways and the distant jungle glowed and glittered and danced in the crystal vapours evolved by the sun's heat, all the meadow land sang in the song of the innumerable crickets and grasshoppers, it was an eternal buzzing and hopping and fluttering. And one with that jocund exultant nature, in the enamoured trance of their boy and girl love wandered the human pair in the earthly paradise that opened all around them. When did the bow of Kama shoot awry?

The light grew stronger: it rested its broad wings of gold and silver upon the dazzling waters of the tank, and flashed metallic from the dark green leaves of the lotusses. All at once, something like a vertical thread of lightning twinkled an instant above the blazing waters and then a huge golden spangle seemed to be dangling in the air, I was just about to utter the exclamation "Oh, the poor tench", when everything about me seemed to transform itself: the sky expanded, the tank with the water lilies on its surface expanded, even the flowers themselves enlarged, the walls of the tank and the colonnades also grew in length and height, the Brahmin's bamboo fishing rod straightened itself into the tall stem of one of the ash-tree-like fungus growths, the pectoral fins of the tench spread themselves out into a pair of huge wings and I found myself in the arms of the Karauthmon flying through the air above the fungus-forests, hemmed in by the towering walls of the plateaus,

and half dazzled by the glittering ocean of metallic woodland that lay below me with the brilliant cups of the pezizas emerging above it like the lotus-flowers of my vision, and the conch-like palm-trees resting ensphered in the crystal splendour of a glorious summer morning. It was my last glimpse of the fungus-forest. Higher and higher we rose into the air, the walls of the plateaus shrunk together into two thin narrow lines, like the mantle of a mollusc when you touch its sensitive body, then as our course swerved above the plateaus, the broad variegated flower-bed of the forest also grew narrower and narrower and at length finally collapsed, like the valves of some huge razor shell when the creature inside is alarmed by a passing footstep on the sand. On we flew, the other Karauthmon following us, and before very long I was again deposited upon the level floor of the Karauthmic observatory whence we had set out the previous evening.

"Oh, I have had such a wonderful vision", were my first words, "and yet I hardly know whether it was a dream or a reality: but perhaps you can explain it to me", and here I related very briefly the substance of the preceeding chapters. "Ah, your mind has been harping on that foolish little earth-pellet of yours, I suppose", said the Karauthmon as I thought unnecessarily testily, "I had hoped the wondrous experiences of the past night would have put all that nonsense out of your head. Vision or reality? It is all much the same, what is reality in your planet becomes vision in this: It is like a reflection in a looking-glass. But I trust, you did not fail to observe the wonders of the fungus-forest to which I took you. They are of interest", continued the Karauthmon in a somewhat arrogant and dictatorial tone of voice, "for the development of our own sevenfold organism took place *pari passu* with the evolution of the huge fungal forest trees of our woodlands indeed it was these latter which in a certain sense determined the form our bodies were ultimately destined to exhibit: true, the

ultimate molecular constitution of the planet we inhabit was the primary—.” Here in spite of my efforts to give my best attention to the Karauthmic remarks, after struggling with several irrepressible yawns, I had to abandon the attempt and fell fast asleep. The Karauthmon paused, rolled me about with one of his feet to awaken me and then began again, raising his voice and in rather an aggrieved tone:—“. . . As I was saying to the ultimate molecular constitution of the planet we inhabit was due not only the primary sevenfold development of the organic germ but also those meteorological phenomena of the earlier stages of our planetary history which affected the evolution of its phytal forms (I allude to the cryptogamic vegetation) hence you will perceive . . .”, again I had fallen fast asleep and again the Karauthmon awoke me, “. . . hence you will perceive”, he continued, “that while to the proportion in which the elements are molecularly combined in the system to which we belong is due the sevenfold unity of our cell-development, to the same cause is due also the modification of the meteorological and through them of the vegetable phenomena of the globe and the whole series of vegetable evolution through time, whose development has also had a large, I had almost said, the principal share in determining the ultimate form our sevenfold unity was to take. For the primitive Karauthmic forms living as they did on the fungal fructification as those rose higher and higher into the atmosphere, growing in fact inversely as the primitive storms abated, our progenitors were forced to follow them and to develop into arboreal climbing animals, but as the fungus-trees were at first scattered and increased in height, it became a great advantage to the creatures who fed upon their pilei to be able to fly from tree to tree instead of being compelled to descend to the ground each time they sought a new tree for food, thus little by little our wings, which had as yet remained abortive indications of the septenal plan upon which we were designed, developed, were brought into play and carried

us on to mountain heights where the hurricanes required all our strength to battle against them: on the development of our wings therefore that tripod-like symmetry of legs and feet is due to which you have more than once taken exception. Do you follow me?" I had heard him through a kind of mental mist: straining my attention mechanically, so as to keep awake, but when he paused my efforts to listen involuntarily collapsed and I fell so fast asleep that nothing the Karauthmon could do, availed to arouse me from my trance-like slumber: he therefore quitted me, after arranging a kind of awning to protect me from the sun; I presume, occupied himself with some astronomical observations or experiments: at all events, I was left in peace and continued to dream as follows:—

This time I dreamt I was Agni, the sacred fire of the hearth, into whose care is consigned the sacrifices to the gods and those to the dead ancestors: the true Brahmin's life is in theory one long sacrifice from manhood and marriage to the grave, or rather to the pyre, when after having sacrificed his living activities to the gods through his life, he crowns all by the supreme sacrifice of death in which his body is placed upon the pyre and reduced to dust and ashes. At his marriage some of the sacred fire of the hearth of the young bridegroom's home was taken to his new habitation, there it lived and watched over the life of the young couple, and was the minister of all their joys and sorrows, the indispensable vehicle of their domestic worship and domestic sacrifices and was by them in turn tended and cherished that it might never be extinguished: there it flamed and flickered—the tutelary deity of the household ever reminding the members of it (like the death's head or mummy of the Egyptians feast) that a day must come at last when they would cease to need its ministrations, when the long series of earthly lustrations and ceremonials would be committed to its charge to be distributed once more among the four elements out of which they were originally compounded.

In the days of Sutti or Sati this idea of the unity of the sacrificial domestic life was carried out to its logical conclusion, and whatever horror may be felt at the idea of the widows being forced by superstition and public opinion into the act of self-immolation, it is impossible not to be struck by the poetical unity and profound significance the primitive idea must have given to human life in early times, at least, when we may suppose the widow to have mounted the pyre in the full belief that at her husband's death the cycle of her own earthly life had also completed itself and that nothing remained to be done but to share with him that more perfect state into which they would both be admitted when the final sacrifice on the funeral pyre was completed and their subtle body or bodies now winged their way into states of new existence. How intense must have been this conception in the early Aryan brotherhood is brought home to us when we see how it became the life-spring of far distant stragglers from the primitive settlement in north-western Asia, so that we trace its powerful influence in the religion of ancient Rome, even in the godless gipsy's respect for his camp-fire and his custom of burning his dead and perhaps also in our own Scandinavian custom of kindling at Christmas-time a Yule-log of the sacred tree Igdrasol which symbolizes immortality and also by its rings the brief span of earthly human existence. It has often been remarked by the curious as a singularly striking fact that nothing is known of the way in which the Rommany dispose of their dead, no gipsy's grave having ever been discovered in the wilder haunts they frequent and the horrible theory of cannibalism has been suggested to account for so remarkable and inexplicable a fact. Others again believe that like the Huns, they turn a stream aside, bury their dead below the bed of the torrent and then force back the water into its original channel, but it is much more likely that these nomadic Indo-Europeans follow the custom of their less roving brethren and cremate their dead. It will moreover one

day be realized by the learned that the primitive nomadic Rommany families were the founders of ancient Rome and that the famous Sybills and Pythonesses of the ancient world were nothing more than the prototypes of the humbler gipsy fortune tellers of the present day. It was the Sybill who originated the college of Vestal Virgins at Rome and both her name and the legend of the Sybilline oracles written on *leaves*, which to this day are objects of veneration and the true name of them in Rommany kept secret as a sacred mystery by the Rommany, point unmistakably to the fact that Rome was originally founded by the gipsies and much of its religion and religious rites moulded out of beliefs and ideas brought from the east by the primitive nomadic Indo-Aryan tribes of Zincalee who originally settled on the outskirts of the still more primitive civilisation of Mongol Etruria. It would be taking us too far from the narrative to bring together the various scattered facts and inferences which converge together to render the supreme fact of the foundation of ancient Rome by a primitive tribe or tribes of nomadic Romans little less than certain. I have only been tempted into this digression in order to emphasize the close ties of brotherhood that subsist between the Aryan brotherhood of the east and that of the west, upon whose civilisation and modes of thought the power of ancient Rome has so indelibly set its stamp. Like the heart to the body is the hearth to the household, like the blood to the heart is the fire to the hearth, my light and warmth sped from the hearth to the household, to me the members of it brought the particles which were to form their diet, I transformed the crude grain into soft and digestible food and then sent it forth to nourish the family just as the blood carries the particles that are to nourish and build up the muscles and nerves which are ever wearing away with exercise, into every crevice and corner my heat found its way and was reflected back again and supplemented by fresh material, and as my flame of life leapt high, currents of

air were drawn in from outside the house—air that my warmth, my life-blood had already suffused and penetrated, so that my life was in very truth that of the household itself and its surroundings and I knew or rather felt intuitively all that the household thought and did and felt. Even though I flickered lazily on the hearth like the tongue of a serpent that hardly stirs in its long winter-sleep, still I saw the Brahmin when he went every morning on to the hillock where the sacred fig-tree grew, a stone's throw from our house, and I know that soon the morning meal would be prepared and the balls of rice and ghee and clarified butter be given me to carry to the dead ancestors that these might have some sort of subtle body wherewith to cloth themselves and need not be tempted to come prowling round the habitations of the living and to annoy their descendants with querulous repinings at being left in a wretched state of comfortless disembodiment. How faithfully I carried these offerings into the upper atmosphere, and how faithfully in turn I was tended and cherished by the Brahmin and his family. On and on I flickered by the hearth-stone and I knew that a day would come when the Brahmin himself. . .ah! how fat and unctuous he grew with each succeeding year. . .what a feast he would be. . .for the gods, I mean. Behold him by the fig-tree on the hillock outside doing pooja. What a funny way to say one's prayers. His sacred Brahmin's cord is thrown over his left shoulder, with the finger of his right hand he has firmly stopped up his right nostril and is blowing with all his might down the left one, now the same process is repeated with the right nostril, and now he has stopped both, has taken a deep breath, is holding it as long as possible, and is puffing out both nostrils with it while holding them firmly with the finger and the thumb of the right hand. You laugh, my Christian reader, but, perhaps, this peculiar ceremony may be as effective a means of obtaining spiritual and mental enlightenment as many of your own muttered formulæ for the same purpose: for

physiologists tell us that mental intelligence and the healthy working of the brain are largely dependent upon the constant oxydation of the end organs of the sense of smell located at the cribriform plate of the ethmoid, that is to say, upon a free passage along which the fresh air can circulate unimpeded. Is the Brahmin's first act of pooja then so ridiculous? And now, see, he has proceeded to the second act, has stripped off his white Brahmin's robe and turban and is laving his body with fresh water from the Ganges—thrice happy man, it runs but a few miles from his dwelling place, and he is rich and can have it brought there every day, while reciting a short service of texts selected for the purpose from the Rig-Vedas. Now he has finished: now my lord and slave returns homeward: cherishes me with dung of the sacred cow: with his own hand prepares the breakfast of rice and curry and then places the black pebbles sacred to Vishnu upon my hearth-stone in a certain order, and here and there the consecrated balls of rice and ghee which I shall have to carry into the ether-world, to gratify the gods and pacify the exacting although ethereal maws of the ghosts of those restless importunate ancestors who are ever ready to post down to the nether world on a haunting excursion which might cause infinite annoyance and mischief among the living.

And now, while the Brahmin is waiting his eldest son's return before beginning breakfast, there is time to say something about himself and his family.

CHAPTER XI THE PUNDIT

Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh was a high caste Brahmin of great repute and belonging to one of the most distinguished families in his neighbourhood. No one could officiate more effectively at the elaborate baptismal service upon which so much of the welfare of a new-comer

into this world of sin and sorrow so intimately depends, consequently his fees were high both for attendance at this ceremony and also at the one which signalises the coming of age of a well-born Hindoo. The fees gathered in at these ceremonies alone coupled with the ample patrimony he had inherited from a long line of Brahmin ancestors, would have sufficed to render him a man of wealth and standing, but his affluence was still further enhanced by the ample dowry of his late wife (he was a widower) and by the numerous offerings of butter, corn, fruits and flowers besides money which were left by the devout at the shrine of the famous image of Vishnu to propitiate the god or to obtain his favour. Lastly, as a successful match-maker and officiator at the costly marriage-ceremony he was recognised as being unrivalled in the neighbourhood.

Indeed, even in the sacred city of Benares, not very far distant, where in his day he had justly earned the reputation of being a learned Pundit, his name was still not unknown and he had been more than once summoned thither to adjust matrimonial matters that required the sure and certain hand of an experienced divine. Then how comforting it was to have him at one's house if one had to have one of those elaborate sraddha ceremonials to get one's dead ancestors fairly settled in the grave—ceremonials, the cost of which certainly ran up to an enormous figure, nay, which often ran off with the better portion of even a wealthy man's patrimony, but which after all were worth the trouble and experience if one could feel quite sure that they had been carried out by a thoroughly competent officiator, so that no single link in the complicated arabesque of religious ceremonial had been omitted or slurred over: so that, consequently, no possible loop-hole had been left for the ancestral spirits to creep through and return again to earth by. The sraddha-ceremonials for the dead in India, ceremonials which, if performed in Benares by a high caste Hindoo of Southern India, have been known to cost as much

as £120,000 sterling of English gold, and to cripple his estate and resources for generations often to the grievous detriment of the public welfare, in their wasteful selfishness and the injury they cause the unfortunate serfs of the soil, bear a singular resemblance to our own English laws of inheritance and entail and to the futile and ruinous efforts great landowners make to retain a particular piece of land in their own family by means of tying up and cumbering with vain and idle regulations the property they leave behind them after they are dead. Only we note this difference that, while our own land-laws are an ingenious device for giving the spirits of the dead the greatest possible power of interfering with the property of the living to the ruin of private morality and the ghastly demoralisation of the lower orders, the Sraddha rites of the Hindoos are at all events a well meaning attempt to prevent this interference, only unhappily superstition and priestly greed has vitiated and perverted what was originally not perhaps very faultily devised, so that in point of fact the costly ceremonials of the Sraddha serve rather to perpetuate that very interference of the dead with the living which it is their expressly avowed object to get rid of. But of course to a high caste Brahmin and learned pundit like Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh these elaborate ceremonies were unnecessary: thanks to his knowledge of the Tantras and the Mantras and his rare skill and aptitude in working out magical formulæ—a talent for which he had been celebrated even in his early college-days at Benares, he could concentrate such an army of imps and devilkins upon any obstreperous ancestral spirit that he would have been a hardy ghost indeed, who should have dared to pit his poor limp etherial essence against such a solid material antagonist as his successor armed with such deadly and supernatural powers as that successor possessed. There was indeed a tradition in the family that a certain ill-advised ancestral ghost had once had the temerity to attempt to haunt the Pundit's bungalow in

order to offer a mild protest against the scantiness of the rice-balls and the rancidness of the clarified butter (apparently he had been deputed like *Oliver Twist* in the workhouse to ask for a little more and better fare), but he went back to the place from which he came with such a hot one on the nose and such a remarkably vivacious flea in his ear that no ghost after him ever tried it on again with Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh, and meeting in sad conclave a few days after the disastrous experiment the whole company of ancestral ghosts decided unanimously that it was wiser to bear the ills they had than to run to others that they wot not of.

No wonder, then, with all his magical formulæ, spiritual emoluments, public reputation, and private fortune partly inherited from his parents, partly accruing to him from his defunct wife, if Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh was a wealthy man, no wonder if he was held in not a little awe as well as reverence in his own neighbourhood, and if even beyond his sphere of influence as a local magnate, his fame as a man of great and rare mental and spiritual attainments began to gather weight and to be spread abroad in ever extending circles of wider and wider circumference. There was another circumstance that tended to increase his authority, his reputation for sanctity and the high opinion that was held of him both as a learned and accurate divine and as a teacher of a pure and spotless moral code of which he himself was a shining example, viz:—the peculiar relation of his family to the famous Vishnu-shrine of which they had been for generations the jealous guardians and administrators. According to family tradition the statue it contained was either the work of one of the members of the family some centuries ago or it had been executed under his directions and at his expense. In civilized countries, whose civilisation is not of yesterday, the established or recognised religion or religions run a singularly uniform course, provided they have time to develop themselves: this is due not only to the extremely

limited scope of the human intellect, but also to the paltry circle of feelings and ideas in which our imagination works. Sooner or later the religion which satisfied the less critical minds of early times ceases to prove adequate to a more intellectual age, systems of metaphysics are built up to prop and buttress the now rickety temple of religious faith, these in their turn give way, as the shifting premises upon which they are founded drift this way and that like the desert sand, morality having been vaguely associated with the religious creed suffers and falls into disrepute, at the very time that an appeal to the emotions as the ground-work of our human existence appears to be the last resource for those who crave a rational belief and some solid ground-work for their hopes and aspirations. These ideas enforced by the clamorous demands of the passions which grow more complex *pari passu* with the more elaborate and diversified forms of social life, become at length irresistible, and a period of religious corruption sets in to which both high and low succumb. Everything appears to be rushing to the abyss but the excesses themselves work their remedy in the disgust they engender: some reformer or saviour of society arises, who perceives clearly or thinks he perceives the necessary connection of religion and morality, that is to say, the more or less accepted code of decent behaviour as heretofore taught, the abuses are reformed, the religious orgies are strictly repressed, the articles of belief are simplified, generally in the direction of monotheism, and for a time all goes on well. Sooner or later, however, the reformer dies, the impetus given to a purer morality by his teaching and example gradually subsides, and the members of the sect he had founded realize more or less consciously, how large a share the personality and character of their inspired prophet had, in filling the sails of their new creed and in preventing the ship from foundering. Deliberately or instinctively, in order to keep alive the flagging reformation, they deify the reformer and worship

as a divine incarnation the very man, the whole pith of whose teaching was the spirituality of God's Essence and the impossibility of his incarnation as a human being. This is the fate which is said to befall every religious reformer in India, and is certainly the one which has befallen the two most illustrious of her prophets, those two, whose whole life was devoted to an unsparing polemic against the notion of incarnation and the idolatry of which it is the inevitable parent. With Gautama, the primitive Buddha, we have nothing to do at present, his work fell outside the sphere of the tangled mistle-toe of Hinduism, but the other great, although less original religious Hindoo reformer, Sankaracarya must be mentioned cursorily, because he it was who inaugurated the great reforms in Vishnav worship which have to some extent rescued it from the gross idolatry into which it had at one time fallen, and to his efforts are due its transmission in a mystic and spiritualized form to the present day, although to some extent the clearing he effected in the jungle of superstition is closing in again, and only here and there in that tangled growth are to be found oases of wholesome doctrine and simple faith where the light of heaven can shine more or less unobscured. It was to the excesses of a peculiar form of Vishnavic worship known as Saktism that the success of the reformer and of other reformers was greatly and perhaps principally due—excesses, which caused a reaction of disgust against themselves. The worship of the God of Love had, in fact, as might have been foreseen that it would do, developed in a critical age when the grounds of all religion were being subjected to a minute process of sifting and scrutiny, into adoration of the female element in nature and particularly of its manifestation in the human female sex. The liberty perhaps wisely accorded to women in the primitive ages of the Vedas was invoked now by the innovators as a precedent for giving to women the fullest rights of citizenship and placing them before the law in perfect equality with the other sex. So far there

was nothing to find fault with, although the fact that women have sunk from a state of liberty to one of complete subjection in India, and that the wisest of Indian writers and philosophers on social matters have gradually come to the certain conclusion that women are incapable of independence, and must be carefully watched and kept out of mischief by their parents in youth, their husbands in middle life and their male children in age, strongly confirms the conclusions of modern science and modern thought in its wisest manifestations, that, although it may be well to give to women the same opportunities of education that the male sex has long had, still in the long run it will be found that the domain of women is essentially and necessarily different from that of man and to a certain extent more bounded and circumscribed. But the Saktist innovators were not content with preaching the natural equality of men and women: they went further and declared that it was through women as especially the vehicles of love, passion and the tenderer emotions that the second person of the Trinity revealed himself to the modern world, that not only the recognition of women as equals but as the superiors of men was a religious necessity: women, so the freethinkers declared, was the fountain-head of all morality, the sacred depository of all mysteries, who, when enthroned as the social and religious Queen and High Priestess of the modern world, would bring about that reign of peace, harmony, purity and refinement, which had been so long desired and so vainly attempted to be realized. The advocates of this religion were, it is true, chiefly town-bred Baboos, poetasters and sentimentalists of habits rather effeminate than robust, or enthusiasts who readily ran away with any new idea which they could declaim about without the trouble of thinking the matter out themselves. The wiser heads of India held aloof: But the innovators were not without influence for all that. Needless to say the female sex, unduly held in servitude for so many generations in Hindustan was with them to

a woman, and besides the women they had to back them up, all the rakes, scamps and blacklegs with which India has swarmed from time immemorial, who knowing the world much better than the enthusiasts and feather-heads, calculated with certainty, upon an earthly Paradise of protracted orgies sufficient to sate a moral Heliogabalus, if the movement was successful, and woman suddenly liberated from the strict discipline of domestic life to be flung upon their own resources, set adrift without moral or mental ballast of any kind, and over and above the market, hoisted out of the common round of daily life on to the dangerous and rickety pedestal of premature deification. Perhaps it was some secret consciousness of the like kind in the breast of the Saktic enthusiasts themselves that spurred them on without knowing it, to pursue their propaganda with a zest and fanaticism, that frequently overstepped the limits of good taste and decency and fermented into the most violent tirades and rancorous libels against the good name and the honesty of those who opposed their mad project. However this may be, the movement succeeded, if the triumph of evil can be called a success. This was not wonderful in a country like India where perfect religious liberty has been enjoyed from time immemorial by all sects and denominations to propagate themselves in whatever way they please and where consequently the tangle of creeds and forms of worship is as inextricable as the cloud wreaths of an autumn sunset that melt into one another, shift, change, evaporate and then condense again in new patterns that again break up into fresh combinations, vanishing and reappearing in a hundred varieties of shape and colour. It is not my intention to pursue the subject of Saktism. I would not if I could. Writers on religious Hinduism draw the veil. I would not attempt to withdraw it and expose the Hindoo Isis to the vulgar and profane gaze of the western world. Mrs. Grundy, the great goddess of the Ephesians, would shriek with a two-edged rancour, her ears would split at the shocking revelations, doubly

revolting from the complete quietus they have for ever given to any tentative claims she might herself be inclined to put forth to a Grundeyan apotheosis. Suffice it to say that the problem of woman-worship and woman intuitionism was as satisfactorily solved by experiment in a negative sense, as the foolish chivalry of the middle ages was finally extinguished and laughed out of existence by the genius of Cervantes. Then came the opportunity of the Reformer, Sankara, and also in a different part of India of the founders of the Sikh religion. The substance of Sankara's reform consisted mainly in attempting to identify Vishnu with the one spiritual god, the Brahm, from whom the universe is supposed to emanate. In a previous chapter, when I described the symbolism of Vishnu's image in the shrine, I dwelt also on its theological significance. In point of fact, the ancestor of Chandra Singh, to whom was due the existence of the wondrous statue, had been an enthusiastic admirer of the great reformer and an ardent believer in the doctrines he expounded and had conceived the happy idea of embodying those doctrines in a sculptured figure of the deity which should exhibit them emblematically. Whether he himself executed the statue with his own hand or employed a sculptor to carry out his ideas, is as I have said, uncertain, however this may be, he in a manner succeeded in arming idolatry against itself and preserving the doctrine of Sankara taught at the shrine from the fate which befell it in many parts of India. For, as I have indicated above, in process of time the followers of Sankara were led by the waning influence of their sects, to flog up the jaded enthusiasm of their proselytes by deifying their founder, he was declared to be himself an incarnation of Vishnu and in course of time became the recipient of those very idolatrous honours which he had spent his whole life-time in endeavouring to repress. But at the temple where the family of Chandra Singh had now for many generations ministered, although the form of the service (as almost everywhere in India) was idolatrous, the symbolism of

the image and the doctrine which had been jealously guarded and handed down intact from father to son in Chandra Singh's family pointed to a monotheistic or pantheistic mysticism, nor had the moral teaching of the great reformer altogether evaporated in the process of devolution. The lives of Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh's ancestors had on the whole been at all events outwardly respectable, and any deficiencies in personal conduct had only served to impress upon them the necessity of atoning for their own moral shortcomings by sternly imposing upon their congregation a rigorous and detailed following out of the Master's ethic and discipline. And thus it happened that Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh had come in for what one may call a sort of cumulative reputation for sanctity which had grown in proportion as each succeeding generation had managed to acquit itself creditably and not to fall short of the trust and confidence imposed upon it. And this very traditional respectability, if I may call it so, in a manner reacted upon the succeeding generation, for not only did outsiders say: "he must be a good and orthodox Hindoo, he is a Dhoondhoo Singh", but each successive head of the family said to himself: "I must let people see that I am worthy to be the head of a family which has been so signally blessed and favoured by the great god Vishnu himself and which has for so many centuries enjoyed a reputation for wisdom and sanctity." And thus with Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh himself the now head of the family, the desire had ever been present to uphold the family reputation for learning and piety and, so far as that could be done without any undue strain upon one's private life, also for saintliness and morality. And on the whole his efforts had been successful. More and more the neighbourhood was beginning to look upon him as a saint. And once the process of popular canonisation has been set a-going it increases with an accelerating velocity. It flatters the vanity of every inhabitant of a district to believe that the region he belongs to has been the birth-

place of a saint or sage, and not only does popular vanity begin to brag of its hero but the large class of publicans and lodging-house keepers find it to their interest to vaunt him to the skies, for his sanctity brings customers to their taverns and lodging-houses, and if he is sufficiently puffed, his bones may be no less serviceable after he is dead. So then Chandra Singh himself at the early age of fifty found himself on the high road to deification and already no mean rival in popular estimation of the god he served. True it was that besides his very numerous partisans who were never weary of quoting him, of singing his praises day and night, of already elevating him to the skies, there were others (but what great man ever escapes the calumnies of the spiteful and the envious) who held their tongues about the saint and among themselves quietly laughed at Chandra Singh's pretensions to sanctity and infallibility. These others were, moreover, not of the class which ordinarily furnishes the calumniators and the backbiters who prey upon society, they belonged to the highest class of all the most select of the princes and nobles, the flower of the native aristocracy, people versed in public affairs and brought by their daily avocations into contact both with the Feringhees, the white Sahibs, and also with every sort and condition of the varied population of the district. Like their fellows in many parts of the world, they had seen too much of the popular religions and the way in which they were worked to repose much confidence in them and had for the most part hammered out for themselves an eclectic esoteric creed, mainly drawn from practical experience and the higher science. Not that they divulged their thoughts in speech, they were too just and too cautious to do that, nay, if the name of Chandra Singh was mentioned to them by one of his devotees they were wont to express with an exaggeration of effusive enthusiasm, various eulogistic opinions about the Pundit. These opinions for the most part took the form of exclamations:—"What a charming person your father is!"

they would say to his elder son whom they regarded with esteem, "so full of information, so agreeable, so able to adapt himself to every one's humour and caprice." But in spite of these admirable qualities it was observed that Chandra Singh was not admitted to their houses and that none of them ever made any offerings to the shrine. And this reticence perhaps injured Chandra Singh more than outspoken blame on their part would have done. For it set a-wagging the tongues of the numerous class of busy-bodies who frame their claim to some sort of social distinction and position out of the broken fragments of knowledge they possess, through lackeys and maids in waiting perhaps related to themselves, who figure in their piecemeal narratives as friends and confidants of the great man, of his most secret thoughts and sentiments and of the why and wherefore's of his apparent likes and dislikes, aversions and prejudices. It fell therefore to these good people to give a popular exposition of the real, true, genuine reasons, as divulged in moments of relaxation by the great man or by her ladyship, to those highly favoured individuals, their own relations, my lord and lady's dearest confidants, and redivulged by these latter to their highly favoured selves, why my Lord Marquis studiously ignored Chandra Singh when he met him in the street and why Prince——gracefully turned the conversation when his name was mentioned. And there were not wanting definite charges or slanders against the good man, and whisperings from mouth to mouth, of certain excesses committed some fifteen years before, shortly after the somewhat sudden death of his wife at the birth of their second son: excesses which might perhaps have been excusable in a priest belonging to a looser of the innumerable Vishnu sects but which were unpardonable in the head of a family which boasted of transmitting untainted the pure and reformed religion of Love as it had been bequeathed to them by the blessed Sankara himself. When these charges were brought forward in the presence of any of Chandra Singh's warmer adherents

and devotees, these were not slow to rally to his defence: —“Let it be admitted, that there were here and there what might be considered black spots and lacunæ in the life of the Saint, after all they were human failings which had doubtless been repented of, which after all brought him in tenderer and closer sympathy with poor frail humanity, just as the Blessed One himself by the mysterious act of his incarnation had been brought, as it were, into touch with his worshippers, could sympathize with their sufferings and condone their misdeeds.” And if the person who hinted the accusation brought charges of yet darker vices, peculiarly infamous in the eyes of all good Hindoos, vices which were connected with the breaking of his Brahmical caste, irregularities of life shared with the western dogs of Feringhees, the friends of the calumniated High Priest still had their answer ready. How necessary it was they would urge, that the minister of a God of Love should know the height and depth of the Sublime Passion, should be in a position to test and know the spirits whether they be of God of Yama and Mara, the principles of evil and of death. What in ordinary mortals must be looked upon as profligacy and debauchery, was a very different thing in an investigator of morality, in one who was expected to have a thorough knowledge of the human heart, in a word, in one who was a professor of religious truth and a revealer of the divine mysteries connected with their sublime unapproachable Vishnu, God of Love, and second person in the Blessed Hindoo Trinity. And at all events, even the slanderers themselves admitted that these trumped-up charges which they brought against their distinguished victim related to a long distant past and was it not an injunction of the Blessed One himself to forgive one another’s shortcomings and to be merciful in one’s judgment of one’s neighbours conduct as one hoped to find mercy and forgiveness oneself when ushered into the presence of the God of Love. To this, if their antagonist replied with a sneer as perhaps he might, that on this

reckoning saint and rake became little else than synonymous terms the apologist would take refuge in vague generalities and protest that an unregenerate person could not enter into the position of one who was privileged to consider himself in communion of the blessed Vishnu and who had himself learned to know something of the heights and depths of Grace. And here the dispute generally came to a conclusion, as such disputes mostly do, by the parties to it having to admit that they were quite unable to enter into one another's sentiments and were bound to confess themselves at the opposite poles of moral consciousness. If any of these charges happened to be brought to the ears of the good man himself, he generally heaved a sigh at the wickedness of the world, piously breathed a prayer to Vishnu to pardon the malignity of his own and his priest's enemies and maintained a discreet silence about the charges themselves. And these charges? Did they contain any substratum of truth or were they nothing but a tissue of malignant falsehoods woven into a semblance of truth by the busy tongues of gossips and tittle tattles? Let us assume they did: for, alas! neither in India nor in our western world are many of us so armour-proof but the poisoned arrows of the bazaar and the reptile press can find some weak spot to penetrate and leave a sting. Those who with no special aptitude for the career find themselves constrained either by caprice or by the force of circumstances to adopt the profession of a saint find themselves from the very outset in a pitiful dilemma. They must either drag themselves through the horse-pond of repentance and content themselves with playing the subordinate roll of mouthpiece to some already accepted oracle, or they may take the more ambitious line of posing as moral teachers and regenerators of their age. In the first case they must be content to stifle all the individuality and originality of their nature and simply enforce the dogma's supposed to emanate from some would-be saint, who was in all likelihood far from flawless himself and whose ideas in the course of

ages will have most certainly been largely modified by the minds and mouths through which they have been transmitted. Here the texture of the original fabric will have warped, here bagged until the primitive pattern is hardly discernible at all. And when we come to look into the process of canonization and saint-mongering, what a mass of fanaticism, vulgar prejudices, and local self-interest goes to the making up of a perfect saint and to pitch-fork him into his canon's stall. And not only is this the case but the saint of one denomination, may be the boguëy of another, just as Ziska is a hero to the Augs-burgers and a monster to the Papists and Cardinal Bor-romeo a Saint to the Florentines and a bloodthirsty butcher of the Pope of Rome in the eyes of the Protestant Grigioni whose degraded neighbours in the adjacent Catholic vallies and cantons cherish his memory as that of one of the holiest sons of the church and look upon Robustelli the tool of his orgies of pious-butchery as a noble patriot, so that to this day the massacre of their protestant fellow citizens in the Valtellina is spoken of with pride as a sacro macello—a massacre well pleasing to the Lord. But to return from this brief digression to the other horn of the dilemma. If the intending saint decides against going through the horse-pond to Canossa, and then fussing away life as the apologist of some idol of popular caprice not less a medley of clay and dross than he is himself, if he chooses the better way, because truer to his own individuality, to the being, the Atman, the dew-drop of which nature itself is the origin, then he has before him the difficult task of reconciling, if he wishes to influence humanity by his teaching and example, the apparent discrepancies of his perfervid youth with the dim religious light from the retrimmed lamp of his present, he has to pose as to some extent the champion or at least the apologist of his past follies, and either by continuing them in the idealised and transfigured form of mild benevolence or else by representing them as the appropriate phenomena of the age of life at which they

occurred, to round off the dubious knots and angles of his past to get the shady parts of it out of sight, to fill in ambiguous chinks and crevisses, to gloss over anything that might seem equivocal or exceptional, to paint out with a bold hand any more permanent patches or blotches and in general to endeavour by every means in his power to round it all into one perfect whole. Now, according to our supposition, Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh found himself so placed, let us say, by circumstances that he had nothing else for it but to impale himself upon one or other of the horns of the above mentioned dilemma. He was in fact very much like the cadet of an English family possessing the advowson of a fat family living. I am here carrying on the train of thoughts in a waking state that the vision seen as Agni, the sacred fire of the hearth, suggested at the time it was experienced. Young, hopeful, sees in the comfortable vicarage, hard by the paternal mansion, all the means of passing a comfortable life of harmless ease and luxury and accepts his destiny with thankfulness. Through the wisdom of his parents he is sent to one of those marvellous seminaries of clerical morality and Christian purity, a public school. Having played the rake there either in imagination or reality or indeed both for to pass unscathed through the Moloch fires of the modern Phœnicians is an impossibility and as a matter of fact has never been accomplished by any dead or living human being, he is passed on to one of the great universities, the tone of which he helps to lower and degrade by his previous knowledge of good and evil acquired in the fetid hotbed of the lesser academy. If he has fallen there, he may content himself with repeating the agreeable lapse a few times at his university and then beginning at once the process of repentance and idealisation. If, on the other hand, he has succeeded at the public school in the juggling feat imposed upon him of balancing your tetrahedron on its apex, he is pretty certain to fall at his university, where he finds himself suddenly transplanted from the simple barrack-life of

school with its tolerably rigid discipline into an intellectual and moral seething tub: for the complex and widely ramifying life of a great university is pregnant with a myriad germs of good and evil, intellectual even moral aspiration become themselves the most potent tempters of the eager and inexperienced soul, in an atmosphere where all the relations of acts and thoughts to one another suffer a sort of sudden transformation. If he falls here as he most likely will, the guardians of our accepted morality, the pillars of our precious state and hard won, perhaps hardly worth being won, civilisation, wash their hands of him with a sigh of relief after his three years apprenticeship in the worship of moral science, and tipping the wink, hand him over to the infamies of London life under the loose supervision of other moral gorgons and demi-gorgons to be ultimately worked up into some sort of mouth-piece and apologist of the accepted order of things. Then comes the final transformation scene of all in the night-mare farce of sowing his wild oats. The moral scissors are opened wide and the mangy past is ruthlessly absconded much as a dog-fancier docks a puppy's tail, leaving a bloody stump that has neither joy nor stuff in it to wag itself. And then, sad epilogue of the dismal tragi-comedy, the portals of the family living also open their shears, the superior person chosen as a help-meet by the family for the jaded indifferent young pastor of souls opens hers, the golden past melts away or is dismissed as the revel of some hideous witch's cavern, the weeds and tares, the worries and vexations of a trivial domestic life choke the soil, and to win some semblance of his glorious lotus-youth and some sort of happiness and peace of mind the wretch, if he does not sink into the brutal debauchery of the pothouse and the hunting field, becomes the hot-headed champion and apologist either of the saintly rakes who have gone before him, or of the social hell their perverse religion has evolved, or of himself, or of all three or any two of them in all possible combinations of number and quality. I have

given this analysis of the working and development of the religious mind a concrete form and have taken my instances from western society in the hope of bringing it more forcibly home to the reader, but much of what has here been said of the victim of western superstition and its religious and educational method applies with equal force to the Brahminism and Hinduism of the East. There as with us the close union of the accepted moral code with an impossible creed of absurd and ridiculous dogmas foisted with all the weight of ecclesiastical authority upon the young mind, just at the age when reason has broken the shell and found the use of its wings, causes a rebellion against both, dogmas and moral code, at the very period of life when the passions are also most clamorous and when the character most needs some overmastering external authority or inward illumination to keep it from rushing to the abyss. There as with us religion in its timid conservatism and with the best intention in the world has proved the most subtle enemy of human purity, health and goodness, the most treacherous conspirator against its free and healthy development in the fresh air of nature's wonder world, with its perennial paradise of love and liberty. Whatever, therefore, may have been the past delinquencies of the worshipful Pundit Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh, I chronicle with satisfaction that he preferred to do his own whitewashing rather than trust to any vicarious spatterdashing he might hope to get as a reward for grovelling at the shrine of some accepted Mediator or Redeemer. The strong individuality of the Hindoo mind and its sturdy common sense reject unhesitatingly these foolish and wicked theories of atonement which have played so large and so sinister a part in the bloodstained abominable record of western religious belief and practice, and to this rejection is perhaps due the tolerance of religious heterodoxy which is one of the most striking traits in the history of Hinduism. It is a man's *own self* that must work out its own salvation with fear and trembling. And in accordance with this precept,

Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh proceeded as well as he could, very much in the way one of those recipients of the family living whose educational career I have sketched above would have done: that is to say, like any respectable person in our own society, before everything else he endeavoured to hush up, bury in oblivion and put out of sight any of those traits in his own life to which a censorious and evil thinking world might take exception, and having done this as well as he could he next set himself to gain for himself spiritual peace of mind by building up a moral system in which the somewhat diversified mosaic of his past and present career might cohere together and form one perfect and consistent whole. And having done this he did not hide his moral revelation under a bushel but preached it boldly unto all the world. And in doing this he was wise in his generation. For according to the large body of his congregation who believed in him implicitly this large-minded tolerance of the failings and errors of poor humanity could only be the outcome of a pure and spotless life both in thought and deed while at the same time they declared with all the force of their lungs (a section of the religious body often sounder and clearer than its understanding) that such tolerance and large-mindedness in one of unimpeachable morality and course of life was even more praiseworthy and more wonderful than it would have been in a person of loose and dissolute life, such people being prone to lavish a kind of easy charity which they hope may also serve to cover their own lax conduct and shortcomings. On the other hand, those of the faithful whose greater knowledge of the world gave them an inkling of the true state of the case, professed to see in the doctrine preached a double exculpation of the preacher of it. If, it was urged, such beautiful and comforting ideas were really the outcome of courses which it might be difficult for a strict and rigid morality quite to justify (they put it euphemistically so) followed by a hearty and genuine repentance, could one altogether blame the previous life

and could the tree which proffered one such wholesome and palatable fruits of doctrine be itself so very much amiss: at all events, the fruit was faultless in flavour and properties, what matter if the odour of the flowers had been a little rank before they set? And, in any case, even if one dismissed this theory, how pathetic, how touching, how pleading to every heart was this mute appeal of their beloved preacher for mercy and a charitable judgment at their hands, this tacit confession of wrong deeds done in the past and no doubt long ago repented in blood and tears, this charity which seemed, in fact, to say: "I have had enough to embitter me, I have received the wages of sin and yet preach no bitter doctrine, then, oh! shew some forbearance with my sins as I have been long suffering towards your own." Not that, when we come to look a little closer into Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh's mental economy, many of these high-flown sentimentalisms and transcendentalisms are by any means discoverable there. As a matter of fact having dovetailed his past and present together as well as he could, and having formed them into a tolerably consistent, organic whole, he dismissed the whole affair from his inner consciousness and set himself to enjoy what remained of the good things of life in the best way he could. And at the age of fifty, when the vehement passions of the first prime of life are already in a fair way to subside, he began to perceive, with a growing conviction of the accuracy of his generalisation, that the most satisfactory and enduring kind of enjoyment was that which consisted in the homage and respect paid one by one's fellow creatures: like a peptic to the jaded appetite, it gave a fill-up to one's vanity, that still perpetual after-glow of the passions, which was pretty near all that now remained of his once roystering and exuberant youth. And so little by little as the advantages, and distinctions and dignities and last but perhaps not least the solid emoluments which accrued from occupying a perch upon the slippery pedestal of sanctification and public veneration, came home to him

every day with increasing certitude, the dogma of the infallibility of his own ideas as well as of what I may call the general body of family Vaishnavic doctrine and the conviction of the saintliness and sublimity of his own life and conduct, grew in no short space of time to be the ruling principle of his mind, while the yearning for adoration and recognition as a sage and saint by every one with whom he came in contact in like manner became little by little the ruling passion of his life and conduct. And in all this I do not in any way wish to represent him as a merely calculating and ambitious hypocrite who exploited his religion for the sake of gain and of acquiring a solid and important position in society. From first to last he had clung firmly to the traditionary family-belief, and in the worst of his excesses had always promised himself that sooner or later, the weakness of man (his own unfortunate peccadilloes, that is to say) should become an instrument in the hands of the god and should in the end redound to his (Vishnu's) greater praise and glory, and when he saw that every day his hopes and wishes were realizing themselves in the growing reputation of his own name among all sorts and conditions of men, it became clearer and clearer to him that his whole of life had been mysteriously ordered and designed by the Divinity under the shadow of whose shrine he had grown up from infancy to youth, and from youth to manhood, whose comforting and salutary doctrine had been imbibed even with his mother's milk, and whose hand was manifestly even now guiding him to those higher heights of grace and godliness which it is permitted those alone to scale who are in the closest union and the most exalted favour with the god. And thus, by a curious process of action and reaction which is not by any means exclusively confined to the spiritual life of religious Brahmins, he justified the failings and imperfections of his own life as in some mysterious way the outcome of the divine dispensation, and having thus found a firm foundation for self-exculpation, the moral scheme of sal-

vation he had worked out for himself and built up to harmonize his own present and past and to condone the latter, rapidly assumed to his imagination and to his easy-going consciousness the character of a divine revelation, and when finally he realized the success of it all and perceived how under the divine bounty, he was every day acquiring a greater and greater reputation among the populace and even amongst the educated for sanctity and learning, this again reacted upon his faith and he saw in it all a clear and practical proof, of the truth of his religion and the power of the god he served. And every day contributed to strengthen and increase this faith or rather certitude in proportion as the thirst for adulation and homage grew to be an irresistible and all-absorbing passion. And thus, at last, through the mere force of circumstances and the natural process of life from youth to age, and not at all from any real substantial scientific proof or chain of reasoning he came to have so intense, so fanatical a belief in his own moral scheme and in the religious faith into which he had been born, that the bigotry and intensity of his opinion would have astonished the ordinary dupes of religious enthusiasm, and led him to declare to himself at all events, that in defence of that moral scheme and that religious faith, almost any act, however ruthless or dishonorable, would be not only praiseworthy and justifiable but an act of supreme duty and necessity. And if at any time he dreaded lest the credit of the shrine might one day be jeopardized by some disclosure of his own past misdoings, the egotism of his nature and the growing desire to be hailed by all as the revealer of a true universal infallible doctrine of faith and morals, fortified tenfold the previous resolutions, and, imagining all sorts of possible cases, he said to himself that in defence of his good name and reputation for sanctity, he would sacrifice without pity almost any object, even the dearest treasure of his heart. With these sentiments and ideas it is not to be wondered at if he exacted within the family-circle a homage and respect

even more exorbitant than that which he demanded from the world outside, nor can it be surprising, either, if the dread lest one or other of his sons, but especially the elder, his destined successor to the priesthood, should ever become cognisant of his moral shortcomings, haunted him like a nightmare of the imagination, until at last it appeared too terrible to be even so much as possible.

And time rolled on and the past of fifteen years ago or more seemed dead and buried. His son believed in him, for youth and boyhood have a rare faculty of idealizing, they have not reached the critical analysing stage of life, and moreover much in Chandra Singh's personality was worthy of respect and admiration. True, in these last years of his life, his claims to infallibility and the tyranny with which he insisted upon every the least one of his opinions on the most trivial matters being accepted *nem: con:* in the family as beyond the reach of argument or discussion, as in fact something scarcely less than a revelation from the Deity himself—this growing habit of perpetual dogmatisation began at times to be not a little tiresome, but then his two sons had been brought up to believe and really did half believe in his own preposterous claims, and stifled their sense of irksomeness as though it were a kind of high-treason to their father and an impiety to the God himself. And, then, Chundra Singh had justly won claims to the gratitude of his eldest son, by his admirable instructions, in the Vedas, and the other religious and legal books which it is the duty of every well-educated Brahmin to understand and know by heart. It is not given to every learned man to know how to share his knowledge with the less instructed. Many a well-read man keeps his memory safely locked away in his note-books, others require the electrical influence of other brains learned like their own to set the nerve-cells in motion and to unlock the treasures stored up in the mind to which they minister. Others again possess an enormous medley of facts, loosely and inaccurately remembered, ill co-ordinated and of very different degrees

of interest, with these such persons deluge their interlocutor as though the art of conversation consisted in drowning the thoughts and ideas of other people by douching them with a cataract of ill-assorted facts. But Chandra Singh was none of these. He always kept his knowledge well in hand, listened with genuine unfeigned interest to the views and information of other people, knowing full well that there is no one, however small and insignificant, but the greatest and the wisest of men can learn from him something of interest which he did not know before, nay, rather than check the flow of conversation in those with whom he was talking he allowed many an opportunity to escape him of bringing forward some curious and interesting fact, and when he did contribute anything of the sort it was given with an accuracy and precision of statement which arrested the attention, and with a charm of manner and clearness of articulation which once and for all rivetted the details in the hearers mind. And when at length he did take up the thread of the conversation, he knew how to assort the facts in such a way that one seemed to support another, and by their analogies, as it were, to open a window in the mind of his hearer, to give him a glimpse of a different and higher order of things and so to sharpen his intellect that he appeared rather to grasp the truth himself by a sudden half-intuitive process of reasoning, than to be indebted to the other for it. And Chandra Singh's knowledge was really extensive, thorough and accurate. For besides his perfect mastery of the Vedas and the nine systems of Hindoo philosophy, he had also studied German metaphysics, and understood a great deal about the wonders of natural science in their latest developments. Nay, not only the generalisations and most striking facts, but he had himself practically worked at modern chemistry, physics and electricity in a European laboratory under European professors, and had won their respect for his intellectual acuteness and aptitude for scientific research, by several shrewd sugges-

tions and even trifling scientific discoveries. This was at the time when according to his detractors he had broken his Brahminical caste by associating too intimately with the Feringhees. And besides all this, he was a thorough adept in all that magical science, half hocus-pocus, half mental jugglery, half mesmerism, which our arid Christian rationalisms so long derided, but in which the genius of Braid and others discovered germs of real science which have at length unfolded and developed into the vigorous and growing tree of modern Psychology and Mesmerism. His acquirements therefore were quite sufficient to impress even a stranger with his intellectual capacity: what wonder then if his sons accepted him at his own or more than his own valuation almost in fact as a latent incarnation of the Deity itself: and considered his claim to inspiration to be beyond dispute and cavil. And he was not only a mere conversationalist: he was an author who had met with a warm appreciation at the hands of most of the higher sects of Vaishnavists. For he had utilized his two-edged knowledge of ancient Vedantic intuitionism and of modern analytic science to write and publish a Treatise in which he had attempted very successfully as the orthodox Hindoo World considered, to reconcile religion and science with a subtlety of argument and wealth of illustration which would have put the much derided Paley to the blush, (if that encysted Pundit of Protestantism could have been extracted from his close fitting masque and self-spun cocoon of inane self-complacency), even the much overrated Bishop Butler that ne plus ultra of dry theology would have been constrained to cover his plump round face with the ample curtain of his lawn sleeves, while Drummond's two bullet eyes would have shot in two astonished parabolic curves from his bewildered brain. I trust the treatise may soon be published in the English language and will not therefore risk its sale nor forestall the readers pleasure by giving a dry resumé of the argument. But as a practical exposition of a part of it

Chandra Singh had had executed and placed in the temple of Vishnu those eight statues mentioned and described in a previous chapter representing the eight principal Avatars of the God that he might exhibit to his congregation in a striking manner the close analogy which subsists between the latest biological and geological generalisations and the doctrine of the Kalpas and the Incarnations taught from time immemorial by Brahmins of the Vaishnavic persuasion.

Such then was Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh high caste Erahmin and High Priest of the celebrated Vaishnic temple and shrine of Poojerabad, and I have been compelled to be somewhat prolix in the analysis of his character and antecedents because these it was which moulded the events a record of which is about to follow—events which without some knowledge of the High Priest's character, antecedents and his growing inclination for canonization and the aureole of saintliness would appear rather to have been determined by some idiotic, demon-haunted malignant spirit, than by a mind which claimed a large share of intellect, will, and morality, and to be in a special sense the highly privileged friend and exponent of a God of Love and Mercy.

But hark! there is a pattering of light boyish steps at the hall door. It is Kama and Gudla, the Brahmin's two sons, returning the one from his unwonted frolic with the choir-boys, the other from the enchanted Paradise of his first love. Even my heart of flame leaps and trembles with delight as the dear bare feet patter on the marble floor and the air vibrates to the clear sweet ringing voices which make the very air love-sick and which set a sort of resonance going within me as if I were fain to answer them. But they hurry on into the dining-hall where the Pundit is seated, and the resonance dies away within me and I cower down among the grey ashes and the charred fagots and listen.

FATHER AND SON

The steps slacken as they near the door of the dining room where the Pundit is seated on a divan, inscribing on a piece of ass's skin one of those magical formulæ for which he was celebrated in the neighbourhood and which are so useful if an ancestral spirit in its innumerable journeyings and oscillations between the seven hells and the seven heavens, should, owing to some constitutional taint of blood or bile, itself the consequence of acts committed in a previous incarnation, have unluckily sunk to murderous misdoings in its Brahminical Avatar and thus have doomed itself in its next incarnation on the terrestrial plane, to prowling around the ancestral home, as a lean mangy man-eater which it would be impious to destroy and which is only too likely to make a meal off its descendant. Vaishnavists who have sinned in respect to blood are especially liable to this inconvenient penance: besides sinning they have violated the Law of Love, and having sated the two most powerful passions of earthly human nature, the two opposites—the lust of destroying life and the lust of enjoying it, the dew-drop of the soul or Atman suffers a partial disintegration, the faintest line bisects it and one side becomes almost imperceptibly the very least shade darker than the other and this for innumerable Kalpas or ages modifies the series of incarnations and spirit incarnations in the sthula-sarira and linga-sarira, through which it has to pass. How strange it is, the Brahmin was thinking to himself, that this infinitely slight separation of the Atman from itself should be so prone to manifest itself in the transit-incarnation through the earth-plane in a material visible form as the contracted stripes of black and tawny on the tigers' hide: while on the other hand the Saivist who transgresses the Law of Hate, through effeminacy and soft luxurious living, similarly flits along uneasily under the wan moon as a mottled night-hawk or scours the dreary wastes of

Central Asia as a striped hyena. If our worthy British Government would only take the bull by the horns—oh! Nandi, thy name be blessed, he continued in his lucubrations while swooping round the hand which held his reed pen of indian ink, so as to give the requisite curves and flourishes to the symbols and letters of the mystical formula he was inditing (a matter of no small importance for a curve wrong here or a flourish there might uncoop a whole hen-roost of malignant domestic spirits, ejecting them with a spurt from one of the innumerable fumarioles of the horrible hell of mud which underlies everything, and once their impish energies are unloosed even Ganesa himself would find it a hard matter to repress them and get them securely bottled in again)—if our British Government would only show a little more courage and do like that of the enlightened celestials in the Chinese Empire, and by official decrees forbid our scape grace ancestors from cropping up again in all sorts of uncomfortable incarnations, disturbing to the living and painful to the dead—what an immense amount of trouble and bother we should get rid of. It is true, our Brahminical caste would lose its fees for Sraddha ceremonies or for other secondary ministrations, but then we should ultimately become the advisers of the Government and get all the patronage into our hands, and as the regulators of the decorations to be distributed to defunct spirits and to the minor local deities according as these latter performed their duties in a satisfactory manner in preventing floods, fires, cyclones, and so forth, as those, moreover, with whom rested, in the *last appeal*, the power to compel or to veto any person's reincarnation on the plane of matter we should assuredly acquire far more of wealth and power through the reform than we should lose through the diminution of our private practice.

At this point in his reflections the dining-room door opened and the two boys hurried up to their father with a precipitation that coupled with the state of reverie into which he had lapsed, caused him to describe a very different

flourish on the parchment from that which he had intended, with what result to the peace of mind of the family for which it was intended history does not inform us: he laid the scroll aside and looked with fondness at the glowing faces of the two handsome youths before him, while Kama bent down and kissed his father's hand. The latter responded with a look of affection for both his sons (but especially perhaps the elder, were extremely dear to him, and, disengaging his hand he rose as briskly as his portliness permitted it, and with a sort of rotund swagger waddled to the side-table where on a porcelain dish reposed, glued there in the aspic of its own slime the unfortunate golden tench whose ebbing vitality no longer strong enough to flap its moribund tail hampered and tethered as it was by its own gluten only manifested itself in a faint tremor or undulation which now and then flickered along the glistening skin and culminated in a spasmodic wobbly sort of wave at the candal end. "Caught, at last", exclaimed the Pundit with a short panting gasp of wheezy satisfaction and smiling inwardly at his own cleverness, "how I have befooled that fish flinging him choice morsels of cake and egg, until he believed himself the favoured of heaven and specially exempted from the possibility of sharing the fate of his brethren of the sluice whom he saw from time to time incontinently hauled out of the fish-pond by rod and line. His brother the Brahmin has diddled him? Ha Ha", exclaimed Chandra Singh with a harsh unpleasant cachinnation as he took up the dish on which the tench was laid. "And now we will proceed to cook and eat him." The tench gave a last wriggle as though he half understood what was being said and what was the fate in store for him and then remained perfectly still as if in a kind of trance. "My father is ever fortunate even in his most trifling undertakings", said Kama, addressing himself reverently to his father, "he needs not the sons of Parvati to give him grace. The Blessed One is ever with him: the Blessed One is visible in all my father says

and does." So saying, he knelt and again kissed the Pundit's hand and then all three proceeded to where I was crouching in the ashes that they might obtain my co-operation in preparing a supplement to the morning's meal. How willingly I puffed myself out and did my very best when I felt the warmth of the smooth bare limbs of the dear boys as they squatted on their haunches beside me, the one with a pair of bellows, the other with a half burnt brand in his hand, while their good father replenished me with a cake of dung from the sacred Brahminy bull that always lived in the paddock outside beside the chicken-yard. The blinds were then drawn that not even the shadow of any unholy thing or person might by any chance fall upon the sacred food, and then our good brother, the tench, was put out of his misery by being comfortably grilled and curried. After this they all returned to the dining-room, to take their breakfast, not, however, before they had given me mine in the form of more cakes of cow-dung and one or two fagots from the sacred Peepul-tree that was blown down in the last autumnal storms—how those good people pampered me—not before the lovely Kama, proud of being freshly deputed to this office, had arranged on the hearth three black stones sacred to Vishnu, and had placed near them the sacrificial balls of ghee and rice for me to carry to the spirit-world. And then his dear footsteps, too, receded, the dining-room door closed and the morning meal was disposed of. Then I heard an opening and shutting of doors. Gudla was left to do his lessons in the dining-room and Chandra Singh and his elder son retired to the Pundit's library, perhaps to perfect themselves in those great systems of Intuition, Synthetic and Analytical Metaphysics which are the special glory of Hinduism. Here they remained lost in the immensity of the vistas those sublime air-wrought speculative systems open to the imagination, until little by little the intense sunlight soaked and penetrated everything, a kind of trance-like haze, sparkled from the

waters of the tank which just showed themselves among the columns of the colonnade a stone's throw from the verandah, the same kind of trance-like haze seemed to be hanging in the overloaded air, and even to have soaked through the bodily fibres into the very recesses of the mind itself, everything reeled in the intense sunlight, that broadened and deepened, bodying itself forth as if it were a compromise between life and death, not a soul stirred, the body as if of its own accord sank back upon the couch in the attitude of the blue statue in the shrine and exuded a peculiar honey-scented perspiration quite different from the rank goat-like sweat of the northern climate. The eyes half closed the mind shimmered, as if it were in the agony of some opiate vision, and strange conceptions like that which must have prompted the sculptor of the God to imagine him with a lotus-flower and a lotus-stem emerging from his supple body played around the mind and hovered in the air, weaving and unweaving themselves in cloudy sensuous imagery, like the thin thread of the smoke that above some pyre of the dead hovers as if it were loth to mingle with the amber glories of the sun-set sky. Not a leaf, not a breath of air stirred, only outside the crickets in the maize and rice-fields chirped on and on, as though they were the audible life of nature that throbbed and palpitated and twitched and trembled in the electrical field of its eternal existence, even my flame flagged and flickered and cowered down among the embers, a portion of its heat and consciousness seemed to flow forth and to mingle with that heat and light of external nature outside, to become clairvoyant to far away sights and sounds, to transmit itself through the crystal interspace of the sky and air, and to gather into consciousness, pictures and impressions of far away things and persons. Was it the heart of the young Kama in the chamber hard by beating in the trance of its eternal love-dream that woke these echoes in my flickering consciousness or was it the spirit of his beloved that flew hither to mingle with his and be at rest?

It was a rich bungalow on a rising piece of ground overlooking the flat corn-fields that spread in front of it like an irregular chess-board, the house stood surrounded by platanes and champaks and here and there a teak or sal-tree: there were Persian carpets on the settles under the broad verandah which looked out over the plain in the direction of Poojerabad, whose tank and colonnade resembled in the distance an oblong cut emerald set in white enamel: while the three domes of the mosque-temple might have been compared to three gigantic pearls of the purest quality. From the appearance of the house it was to conjecture that it had only been but lately occupied, the paint and lacquering of the verandah and the windows was bright and almost crude in colour, the furniture in the halls and sitting-rooms of the freshest most modern patterns. And in fact, the appearance of the house was not deceptive: the present occupier was a rich widow-lady from Benares, who had taken it during the hottest months of the summer to be out of the town at a time when Indian town life becomes insupportable and all who have the means migrate to some country spot in which at all events the cool colour of the foliage and the vegetation somewhat alleviate the blinding glare of the sun, where at all events you are spared the eternal clatter and chatter of the dusty crowds of men and animals jostling one another in the stifling unhealthy streets, the swarms of emaciated pilgrims who have followed barefoot every meander of the Ganges from its hundred mouths that empty themselves into the bay of Bengal by continuing their pilgrimage in the same fashion to the sources of the sacred river, to guarantee themselves against the possibility of any future incarnations upon this world of sin and sorrow. What a contrast to the noisy bazaars and thoroughfares of the sacred city, with their never ceasing procession of sacred bulls doing nothing, sacred Brahmins doing perpetual pooja, black goats, destined for sacrifice to the cruel Goddess Kala, butting hither and thither in a skittish agitated manner

and vainly trying to escape through the meshes of the huge net of humanity that sways hither and thither in the stir and bustle of its religious emotion, white goats bouncing and bucking now and then, but less agitated than their swarthy congeners, as though half conscious that they were destined to be liberated as scape-goats to carry away the sins of the people, sacred monkeys swarming about the gates of every temple or religious shrine and seemingly intent upon demonstrating how humorous a thing true religion is by the pranks they were playing upon the worshippers, here snatching a bald Pundit's turban, there running off with a boy's water-melon and pelting him with the pulp, everywhere racing among the cornices with arched backs and curled tails, playing a shy furtive kind of leap-frog with one another and all the time chattering and squalling from the eaves and capitals of the columns of the domes and temples with a noise that rose even above the din and clamour of the streets, deafening as this was even by itself. Yes, one might accustom oneself to endure and even to enjoy in autumn and winter perhaps the stir and bustle of the great religious metropolis where everything was sacred, and allowed to walk about and do as it liked, from the cows and high caste people down to the beggars, faquirs, gipsies, poison-sellers, snake charmers, letter-writers, thugs, religious scoundrelism, religious riff-raff of every sort and kind, down to the pariah dogs, likely enough the resuscitated ancestors in canine form, of the children with whom they were wrangling for the garbage in the street, and with whom they might exchange parts—who knew how soon? in the eternal ebb and flow of new generations and new births. Then it was pleasant to watch the letter-carrier in his bright green square cut coat and white nankeen-trousers edge his way like a knife among that ebbing and flowing hive of humanity, or to see the palanquin-bearers of some haughty noble who lounged within upon the silken cushion his jewelled sword at his side, his semi-military costume all one blaze of

rubies and diamonds and the immense sapphire flashing above his brow from the black fez with its spray of bird of paradise-feathers. How unceremoniously his slaves belaboured the sacred crowd of devotees and animals excepting always the sacred bulls and cows, who tried the temper of the unorthodox and even of the orthodox, by the simple-minded manner in which they strolled into the very spot where they were least wanted, and then with the most innocent naiveté in the world, fell into a brown study and refused to stir an inch or to take any hint that their "non possumus" attitude and pious ruminations were extremely inconvenient in the middle of a crowded thoroughfare. And then all along the thoroughfares from the open shops or rather workshops, indeed they were both at once, what a filing and scraping with files and chisels, what a whirring of hand-looms, and whizzing of potter's wheels and puffing of blacksmiths bellows as the adroit artificers, with their dusky faces scowling in intense concentration over their work and clad for the most part save a white loin-cloth and white roll of linen round the head in their own skins manipulated or rather mani-pedi-pulated their scanty stock of tools (for they used their hands and feet with almost the same facility) and turned out as if by magic forms of the most marvellous grace, delicacy and originality. Yes, in winter and autumn it was all very well to spend a few months in the sacred city, but in summer, certainly, the comparative tranquility of the country was much to be preferred, so at all events thought Rancee Ghotra Das, the Indian widow-lady, who had taken the bungalow of Pindawar described above. She was an invalid in retirement, and had adopted the young girl Lasa Penchdas about fifteen years ago on the death of her husband. The girl was not a pure caste Hindoo at all, in fact, as is evident from her singular name—Lasa Mari Penchdas—some believed she was half Portuguese by her father's side, others that she was half English by the mother's, some that she was the daughter of a Mohammedan Greek

slave, who had been murdered by her master out of jealousy—given the sack and a push into the Ganges to use our slang expression in the sense from which it has degenerated—others gave her a Persian parentage—but whatever her origin, two things about her at least were certain: her extreme and aristocratic beauty and the fondness of her benefactress for the lovely human blossom that was just opening into a glorious womanhood. Singular, that her protectress should have allowed her charge to wander about alone: but it must be remembered that the neighbourhood of Pindawar was always considered a safe one, moreover Ranee Das, besides being an invalid and therefore unable to look after the girl with as much attention as perhaps she might have wished, was herself no strict Hindoo, having changed her original Vaishnavist creed to follow one of the great Monotheistic movements which have of late years begun to attract attention in India and are, it is believed by some, destined at one time or other to revolutionize and purify its religions. And then the country is a very different thing from a large town where of course Lasa was always jealously veiled and guarded if ever she went out shopping to the bazaar. And finally, Ranee Das still preserved certain predilections for the creed of her childhood and had therefore willingly consented to let Lasa go to the great monthly ceremony at Poojerabad on the preceeding night. Moreover, on the occasion of the girl's visit to the shrine, she had been accompanied by the Ayah herself, a former worshipper of Vishnu, and had only by a mere accident been left on the early morning after the service by this woman who wished to have a little gossip with some of her old cronies who lived in the village of Poojerabad. Thus it was her charge the beautiful young orphan had been left alone under the colonnade of Vishnu's tank and had become acquainted with Kama Singh. How beautiful she looked this afternoon lounging voluptuously on the marble couch, with its yellow silk cushions, one hand dangling by its side and dallying with

a palm-leaf fan gaudily painted in red and green and yellow, the other occasionally playing languidly with the violet tassel of the blind which formed a kind of awning above her head and was rolled up in cool weather upon a roller underneath the ridge of the flat pan-tile roof. And the side of the couch was a bath of white marble with marble-steps descending into the limpid water from which the girl had but lately emerged. Now she threw her head more back upon the pillows, the arm that had been playing with the violet tassel gradually relaxed about it, a foot and leg glided unconsciously from the couch inch by inch as the muscles relaxed, the red embroidered slipper just tapping against the marble-pavement and almost detaching itself from the pink shell like little foot, the long lashes also drooped languidly over the brown agate eyes and she fell asleep and dreamt. But the dream was but a repetition of the morning ramble, a reminiscence of the beautiful young Brahmin, only that in her dreaming she seemed to stand upon a broad flight of marble-steps stretching away into the back-ground in an infinite series and each step only a very little higher than the one below it, on each step they stood together hand in hand, but every time a little different until in the far distance they looked like two lotus-flowers, and still farther away like two stars or points of light, and then the whole series was repeated over and over again but smaller and smaller as it receded into the infinite distance. Then three threads of golden sunlight fell through the love-sick air until at last they touched the ground, and as they did so each rang out with a tone clear as the notes of the bell-bird and lo! they were three hairs from her own golden love-locks that had fallen upon the marble-pavement. And after the tones of the three notes had died away two of the three hairs changed, one turned black, one white, the third remained a golden colour. Then the black hair smote the water, and as it did so an agony of desire fell upon her, even the water trembled and quivered and a pink lotus-bud emerged

above the surface: Then the hair of silver smote the water, and with the agony of desire mingled itself a frenzy of hope and expectancy, and withal a dread that even as she felt it declared itself to be but vain and lo! the lotus-bud had opened and changed to a golden citron. Then the golden hair smote the citron and cleft it in twain. And out of it, as the two halves fell apart and sank, behold! sprang herself, stood upon the surface of the water—naked—and then approached the couch, but as she did so, the figure changed and it was her beloved who came towards her, stooped down and kissed her lips. And all the rest was a delirious paradise of golden dreams, flashing out and scintillating round her like the rays that concentrate round one's image when one looks into deep water at midday with the fiery summer sun behind one. Then it all faded away into a tranquil night of calm indifference and she awoke. And as she awoke, behold! the shadows of evening were in reality closing round, and the leaves of the platane-trees outside dappled the awning with arabesques all ashen grey. And with the coolness and the shadows came the fluttering notes of a guitar and with the guitar a voice that sang as follows:—

“When the night by dusk attended
Woos the dying day to sleep,
And the dews are all is ended
O'er their short lived bridals weep
Softly slumber
Nought encumber,
Love, thy dream-wove paradise.

Soon thy soul shall cease her weaving
And thy dreams be lost in light,
Like a sail that's scarcely heaving
Just within the range of sight.
Pearly morning,
Gently dawning,
Wake enchantress with thine eyes.”

It was Kama who sang to her in the shadow of the magnolias and then stole away lest he should be discovered. But in the morning something drew her to the magnolia tree and especially to one of the flowers, and there among the yellow stamens was a tiny filmy fragment of rice-paper like a fairy's veil of gossamer that begged her to meet him in the afternoon, for in the mingled passion of bashfulness of their leave-taking on the previous morning they had forgotten to say anything about meeting again. And they met. And again it was as though all the time they had not been together was but an evil dream: and now they were no longer absent from one another, for they were together even in their dreams: and so the days repeated themselves, gilded by a love as innocent as that of childhood, that, when they parted, was still present with them a source of strength and enlightenment to the mind, like the clear cool, refreshing sunshine of an early day in autumn. Day after day they met, and when Kama heard what Lasa had to tell of her own history and how she was the adopted daughter of a high-born Hindoo lady he foresaw no reasonable obstacle to their speedy union, for in the Vaishnava sect he belonged to it was not imperative for a male Brahmin to marry into his own caste, although it was held to be a stigma upon a Brahmin lady by birth to marry out of the Brahmin-caste. But still they kept their love-affair a secret from their elders, partly out of bashfulness, partly to enjoy a little longer the mystery and romance of it, and if Kama's father suspected anything, it could only have been from his son's increased vigour of intellect, for, in the first love outblossoming of a perfectly innocent life, love quickens the intellect, the memory acts automatically, a thousand fragments of knowledge that seemed to be mere jotsam and flotsam of the mind are seen by intuition to have something in common either to one another, or to have a common root in nature, just as they appear to the sage who sees the same thing by the aid of a long analysis of things, sees

it dispassionately with none of the glow of nature's life about it. Theirs was not the cloying delirium of a passion that absorbs all the elements of mind and spirit fusing them into the aching yet delicious agony of a desire that knows of nothing but itself when the common acts of life are done mechanically as in a trance and leave no impression on the mind or brain, when the only thing that burns and glows as something true and real is the actual present spent with the beloved object of the passion, a present that bodies itself forth with all the sudden material intensity of the showers of sparks from a rocket which supplant the darkness for a brief instant and then melt away as if exhausted and enervated, into the purple empire of the night out of which they sprang. No, their affection was in harmony with the vast surface of nature, the general impression of cheerfulness and unconsciousness that the chorus of the crickets in the field, and the birds in the coppice, the gorgeous butterflies and the army of flowers perishing day by day and day by day renewing themselves in an eternal sequence and the glories of the summer sun at midday and the summer sky at midnight, produce upon the mind gilding it with light and happiness and fearless security for the future. The darker, intenser, less ethereal passion has its prototypes in various of the most secret operations of nature and nature's beings, but these require minute observations to be perceived, the general aspect of the universe is that of a wanton child in its airy caprice and its indifference whether it builds up or destroys, tortures or causes pleasure.

True wickedness should be up betimes, that is a jaded, abject form of sin which, after the fatigues of a day of duty, prowls about at eventime, and, all unstrung and enervated, is vicious out of mere feebleness: but for a healthy animated wrong-doer there is nothing like the fresh dew on the grass, the glories of the golden sunrise and the assurance that all the gossips and scandal-mongers are fast asleep after their previous night's campaign. Then

you can do wrong and find a real pleasure in wrongdoing, taste the poison as you swallow it and determine to take another dose. And innocence and wickedness often act upon the same principles. In fact, essentially, if you disregard the merely human classification by which they have been dichotomized into two opposites, virtue and vice are one and the same thing. Nature knows nothing of either. The very young child just emerging out of nature's wonder world knows nothing of right and wrong: neither does the old man just returning thither: he may have committed in his life-time every sin the human being is capable of: it all weighs not a feather-weight on his already half impersonalized consciousness.

His ears are deaf to mortal sighs
Drugged with the chant of Paradise.

And Kama and Lasa also rose betimes, and like childhood and old age, in their perfect unconsciousness and innocence know nothing of wrong and right either and felt no temptation to break any moral law in their sweet eternal love-dream. Why should they? Now was the time to be children themselves while they were still young enough to call back the golden past with its dew bespangled forest of grass and floweret and its impassioned impersonality in which the soul hovered intense and throbbing like a spangle in the sunlight. Among the rice and maize-fields they wandered and by turbid unpoetical brooks that stagnated in their parched channels, surcharged as these were with the filth and garbage of numerous villages thickly strewn over that hot overpopulated land: but best of all they loved to return to the spot where they first met, to linger among the cool colonnades of the lotus covered tank, to dip their feet in the fresh water, to see their image reflected hand in hand upon its surface as they stood with the early morning-sun behind them, to watch the tench basking complacently by the tray-like leaves, and quite unconscious that sooner or later they were destined to be served up

hot on a leaf-like tray, with curried rice and eggs at the Brahmin's table. Touching indeed was the perfect faith they reposed in that good man until the fatal hour came when they were hooked out of existence and the tank by his treacherous line and learnt too late what an illusion their faith had been. Then, as the sun rose higher the two young lovers took shelter in the huge shadowy mosque, and Kama showed his companion the sculptures representing the Avatars of the almighty Vishnu, and explained the secret meaning of their grotesque symbolism. Sometimes even they drew aside the embroidered curtain of peacocks feathers and lotus-flowers that hung before the shrine and stood in awestruck wonder by the side of the marble couch on which reposed the marvellous image of the god. Above him the canopy of cobras heads seemed to undulate in the semi-obscurity, the pearly fangs to quiver as if about to strike, the coal-black diamond eyes to scintillate with sparks of innate fire. And then, as their own eyes rested on the marble figure of the god in the sublime repose of its eternal love-trance, and the beryl lotus containing the four-headed opal Brahm gradually impressed itself upon the retina as their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, a strange indescribable, passionate longing took possession of them, not unmixed with a secret feeling of melancholy at the vastness and eternity of space and time and their own utter littleness and obscurity, not unmixed also with a sense of a something wanting that nothing in the whole universe of time and space either ever would or ever could satisfy. Then they quitted the shrine, silently hand in hand out into the warm tranquil sunshine of the tank with its glowing carpet of lotus-leaves and flowers and the warm sun beating through back and breast, set their hearts beating and rekindled their warm happy child-love, if it was not itself the delight and rapture that the human organism merely transmuted into the heavier gold of human, earthly, love. Then the melancholy feeling disappeared, as a clod of earth crumbles and disintegrates

when you throw it into deep clear water, the shrine and the temple and lotus covered tank surrounded by its marble-colonnade seemed like an image of the dew-drop of their own consciousness and of their inner life, the plain of rice and maize-fields with its never ending succession of crops and its chirping, hopping and fluttering generations of crickets and grasshoppers, succeeding one another, preying upon one another and yet trilling, singing and enjoying, was but a miniature copy of the great world itself in which their inner consciousness dwelt at once part of that external nature and yet different.

Passion, when deep and genuine, is rythmical in its action. Events repeat themselves in a definite order, the feelings love to form them into groups, the mind recurs at set times to some particular scene, even the body recurs at regular intervals to the spot where it was thrilled with some never-to-be-forgotten passion, and thus it is that music and poetry, the forms of art specially devoted to the expression of the emotions, are essentially rythmical: poetry without rythm, music without time are occasionally foisted upon us by literary and musical innovators: but sooner or later they are yawned out of existence by an instinct of humanity as deep as the atom or molecular vibrations out of which all this phenomenal is built up. And this rythmical character of the atoms suggests that they have a closer affinity to orderliness than to anarchy and, if allowed freedom of action would build up a true social order out of the anarchy that calls itself order at the present day. However this may be, to the rythmical instinct of passion is perhaps to be ascribed the regularity with which Kama and Lasa began to meet one another at stated times and in stated places, and to this orderliness again the fact that their meetings and philanderings began to become an object of interest and observation to other people beside themselves. First of all Ranees Ghotra Das, the invalid Hindoo-lady, began to observe how regularly Lasa was away at certain hours in the day and on certain days in the week, and by her

questionings stimulated the curiosity of the Ayah who began to watch her charge with greater attention while appearing to give her more liberty than she had enjoyed before. Thus it came about that in no very long space of time the Ayah had found out all about Lasa's rendezvous with Kama, their walks among the fields of rice and maize, their wandering along the streams, their conversations by the tank and under its colonnades and their visits to the temple and the shrine, and having made this discovery she promptly reported it to her mistress, who, however, by no means desired to put a stop to these love-scenes, when she learned who the youth was with whom Lasa was desirous of linking herself for life and was well assured that the attentions of the young Brahmin were honourable and prompted by a desire to espouse her adopted daughter publicly and to make her his wife. Then some of the village people of Poojerabad began to whisper among themselves: whether at this time Chandra Dhoondoo Singh had any suspicion of the direction his son's inclinations were taking, I cannot precisely say: perhaps not, for as he more and more became convinced of the divinity of his individualism, he grew less observant of things outside his own self-consciousness which he began to say to himself a thousand times a day was the only thing worth studying, being indeed, according to his view, the alpha and omega of all Being, and a direct immediate revelation of the God of Love and Procreation. Perhaps, however, in this constant introspection he may have gleaned some faint consciousness of what was going on: at any rate, however, he said nothing about it, all that could be observed in him of an especial kind was the suavity of his manner in his treatment of his eldest son, and the blandness of his smile when the young Brahmin kissed his hand after the morning poojah had been performed. There was indeed a peculiar tenderness of manner in him which it was very beautiful to behold: he seemed to say in effect by his acts and manner:—My son, I am now already drawing near to the confines of old

age, I already begin to feel the need of some manly arm to support my declining years. Show then a little forbearance, if ever I seem exacting in my demands upon your faith and love—things are divinely ordered; we are but shadows in the vast phantasmagoria of existence, as I am you will be, as you are I shall be, then let me feel that I have your sympathy and your obedience and that the ideas of my life, when I am gone, may continue to live in yours. And Kama, rendered sensitive to any emotional appeals by his own romantic love, softened towards his father and reproached himself bitterly whenever the autocratic temper of the old Pundit began to be irksome to him, and he vowed to himself that in the sacred cause of dutifulness and obedience to his father there was nothing he would not suffer, no personal gratification he would not forgo. And here, surely, we have a beautiful picture of mutual domestic faith and love, and perceive how a life of domestic order and discipline does in happy natures expand into a glorious awakening of a romantic affection that is like a true revelation of nature, clearing away all the difficulties that before seemed to beset earth's bewildered way-farer, and how then this very romance of first love reacts upon the domestic life, transfiguring it, until its behests become identical with a heavenly law and its order a copy of the divine.

But I must now turn to another figure who plays a not unimportant part in the simple drama that is soon about to unfold itself—the Ayah, who was in attendance upon Lasa. This woman, who was generally known as Ayah Churi Puri, I have spoken of as old and so she was in years, as years are reckooned among Indian women,—being in fact about forty-eight—, but she had preserved in a striking manner the smoothness of her swarthy complexion and the blackness of her raven hair. Her figure was huge for an Indian woman, her arms and bust full and rounded, her build altogether solid and powerful. She wore nothing but a large covering of bright orange

silk with arm-holes, it was thrown over her head and girdled at the waist. Her jet black hair was cut short above her low protruding fore-head, that formed a heavy roll of flesh above the nose and eyebrows, the latter thick, straight, short, of a coal-black colour and almost meeting at the juncture of the fore-head with the short, broad acquiline nose. Her eyes were of a greenish-brown, deeply set in the head and could still flash a very earthly fire from the slightly oblique lozenge-shaped gaps between the eyelids, through which the whites of the eyeballs flashed in strong contrast with her tawny complexion, as though they had been made of white biscuit porcelain. To complete her portrait I must say that her lips were still full and curving, showing at times a fine set of teeth between them, her chin was also finely curved and rounded, developing at each side into broad well padded jowls such as are frequently to be seen in the faces of the natives of Naples and southern Italy. The general expression of her face was a mixture of suavity and severe bonhomie with something that now and then flickered a moment about her eyes and mouth which certainly exhibited very little either of suavity or of good nature in its brief and sudden manifestations. Such was Churi Puri in her outward appearance. In her demeanour and general behaviour she was an admirable servant, winning the heart of her mistress and indeed of all she served by a peculiarly gentle deference which left each person with the impression that the nurse had found in him or her and in him or her alone some especial trait of character and some distinction of mind which won or rather wrung from her a quite particular kind of respect and reverence. To her mistress she had become indispensable, the invalid Ranee Das could not have done without her, so great was the ascendancy the Ayah had gained over her mistress, and yet, she never allowed her will to appear to predominate in the least degree but was always as supple and yielding in her mind and manners as she was supple but unyielding in limbs and person.

But if we were to inquire a little more closely what her character and religious belief might be, and in India the two are much more closely linked together than with us, because the catholic variety of its creeds to suit every disposition allows a much greater latitude of choice than the narrower superstition of the western world, I must own that it was an enigma to me, though the course of the narrative will perhaps throw some light upon her previous history and explain some of the motives of her conduct in the ensuing events.

It happened one afternoon that Lasa and Kama were together away from the shrine somewhere near Ranee Ghotra Das's bungalow: the weather was oppressively sultry, and there was an appearance as though a storm was brewing, indeed, from time to time low distant rumblings that sounded like thunder echoed among the colonnades of the tank and eddies of yellow dust from the parched fields outside swept through the gaps in the wall and after reeling and staggering for a moment in the dusky aisles suddenly dispersed or collapsed as they were driven under the shelter of the wall where it was unimpaired. Chandra Singh had finished his correspondence and was dosing over the pages of one of A. P. Sinnett's works on Esoteric Buddhism—for he was a good linguist—.The facility with which the good man had been hoodwinked the enthusiasm he exhibited in his works for the astute persons of whom he had been the dupe and the naive faith he maintained in their honesty to the very last page of his voluminous works, had amused the Pundit at first, but knowing by heart, as he did, all the tricks and devices by which that gentleman had been deluded, he found at last their futile repetition in the pages before him extremely irksome and was beginning to nod and dose over them, when all at once they suggested to him a simple expedient to keep himself awake. "That is why they are such foolish fry", he said to himself as he took down his cane rod and line from the nails on which it reposed horizontally when not in use

under the whitewashed cornice of the Pundit's sitting-room and looked to see that the hook was in good order, "my poor teach, they are undoubtedly the first trans-migrations of European and American Theosophists and British Civil servants of the government who having been pensioned off, imagine they have an immediate call to become mystics and the prophets of a new religion, well, I will bamboozle a brace of them for tea, the eggs are new laid, the curry has been freshly prepared, this will do for them, I fancy", and he carefully baited his hook with a paste of honey, poppy seed, and green peas meal kneaded together with aniseed and a fragment of a strong smelling kind of cheese. He proceeded cautiously to the tank, threw in his line and had already had a bite or two, but owing to some slight nervousness, due perhaps to the sultriness and electricity of the air, had failed to strike the fish at the right moment, when turning round his head for a moment, he observed leaning against the same pillar as that against which Lasa was leaning so voluptuously when we first introduced her to the reader, almost in the same attitude with one hand raised above her head and toying with the straw that hung from the weaver bird's nest (only now the young birds were already hatched and flown) the tall buxom form of the Ayah Churi Puri. At the distance he was from her she looked positively beautiful and being the priest of a religion of Love he had no scruples about letting his fancy make certain excursions into regions of the imagination which the austerity of more ascetic sects keep rigidly under lock and key, at the same time the sight of this woman with her dark Dravidian type of beauty aroused in him a certain sense of apprehension, a certain fluttering of the heart such as the patient feels who has to ask of the physician that question which is all the world to him:—"Is it life or death?", nor was this apprehension diminished when the woman, with a peculiar gracefulness of action and a seductive smile upon her lips ceased toying with the straw that hung from the now

deserted weaver bird's nest—just enough to make a slight sign to him with her forefinger to approach. As he did so the vague misgiving he had felt at first began to deepen, he hardly knew why, perhaps, did he observe the peculiar white flash the oblique lozenge-shaped eyes gave just for an instant before they drooped into their accustomed expression of obsequious and solicitous respectfulness? Perhaps, but if so it was unconsciously, he was endeavouring to recall where he had seen the face before and wondering why it was that its still beautiful features aroused in him passions that had for a long time lain dormant, and had just recourse to that refuge of all destitute memories in Hindustan in similar circumstances,—acquaintance with her in some previous state of existence terrestrial or ethereal, when she raised her left hand from its position between her crossed legs among the folds of her orange mantle and pointed with her middle finger to a small purple mark like the section of a diminutive pomegranate just upon the ridge of the left lower jaw. It was not in the nature of the Pundit's complexion to turn pale, but something of a yellow hue overspread his features and in his eyes flickered an expression of anxious thoughtfulness which from time to time changed but only momentarily into a glance of passionate desire that was rather animal and ferocious than human and divine. "You recognise me, then", said the Ayah. "I am come to do a master whose memory I cherish with the deepest intensest emotions of respect and admiration a service which no one else could render and to save his house and name from a great ignominy." "Let us at all events find some more private place for an interview", replied the Pundit with whose complex emotions was now mingled an uneasy desire to safeguard by a rigorous care for exteriors his good name and his reputation for saintliness while feeling at the same time that his more earthly instincts would have freer play under lock and key, "not to my house, the boys might be about or at any rate the servants would observe us

enter, stay, I have it, we shall be perfectly safe and unobserved and I always carry a key about me." So saying, he proceeded in the direction of the Mosque, beckoned the Ayah to follow and introduced her and himself by a side-door into a kind of vestry which communicated with the shrine. It was a strange group that stood out against the back-ground of tinselled gold upon the wall with its metallic arabesques of peacock's feathers and other emblems of the god. Dimly discernable by the red light of the lamp suspended from the ceiling the wondrous blue marble statue of Vishnu lying voluptuously entranced in his eternal love-dream, and the beryl lotus with the four-headed opal Brahm glimmering in the semi-darkness while above his head reared itself the over-arching canopy of cobra's heads with their flickering tongues and gleaming eyes: and then in the fore-ground the swarthy Dravidian woman in her tawny orange toga, confronting the white robed priest of Love, a half grotesque figure of mingled amorousness and dismay. As though in the living figures of the group the attributes of the sculptured god and his serpent guardian had changed places, all the sublimity of the marble statue in its divine repose seemed to have concentrated itself in the fiery deadly looking woman of Southern India, with her swarthy features and treacherous eyes, while the grotesqueness of the sculptured canopy of hooded snakes had transferred itself to the minister and representative of the god himself. So they stood and conferred together and I would gladly have watched them and learned more precisely what the secret was which the Ayah had to confide to Chandra Singh: but the Pundit had been some time absent from the house and to him and his sons alone belonged the task of cherishing me, the sacred fire of the hearth, hence it befell that my flame of life burnt low, I crouched down among the embers of the sacred Peepul-tree for warmth and only heard snatches of what was said by the priest and the strange visitor at the shrine. Moreover, the clouds were gathering darker all around,

the thunder rumbled incessantly, it was already night in the mosque and the sanctuary, so that, had it not been for the electricity of the atmosphere which stimulated my clairvoyant faculties to some degree, I should have seen and heard absolutely nothing at all. As it was, I gathered that the Ayah was referring to a time some fifteen or sixteen years ago when she was in the service of a very great and learned European lady, who was perhaps more notorious than famous in Anglo-Indian society from the extreme eccentricity which mingled itself with her undoubted abilities. This lady, whose name I conceal out of deference to European susceptibilities, was of high rank and position in the West of England (I am here supplementing the fragments of conversation I heard in the shrine with facts which were widely, if clandestinely discussed and circulated in India and therefore well impressed on my own fiery sensorium). She was connected with persons holding high posts of honour in the Anglo-Indian government and for a time was one of the leaders of fashion among the Feringhees. But little by little she began to find the monotonous round of ball and dinner parties which formed the social life of the Anglo community extremely irksome and retired more and more from these unsatisfying amusements occupying herself with learned studies of Sanscrit Indian philosophy, Indian religion, mesmerism and occultism. A circle of friends gathered round and she became almost involuntarily the centre of a kind of vague gnosticism. Had this been all, there would have been little to blame in her conduct, and society would scarcely have taken the trouble to laugh at her eccentricities, but in the fervour of her eclecticism (so it began to get about) and in her eagerness for knowledge, she began to enter into relations with native Pundits of various sects and denominations, and although her adherents and she herself stoutly maintained that these relations were purely platonic, outsiders and those who had not staked their reputation for good judgment and discernment upon her integrity, told a very different

story. It was observed as noteworthy that she contracted a habit of going from time to time into retreat, according to her own account and those of her friends for the sake of religious meditation, and it was further noted as still more singular that these periods of seclusion tallied in a remarkable manner with those platonic attachments which I have just mentioned. Not that they synchronised exactly. The attachment lasted for about half a year or rather more, the lady then travelled and afterwards went into retreat. As this process was repeated with great regularity and she was a person not much over forty and still possessing very considerable personal attractions, people began at last to express in confidence among themselves a doubt whether the successive appropriations of Sivaism and Vaishnavism, Esoteric Buddhism, Jainism, etc., and their incorporation into the rapidly growing body of her own transcendental beliefs, were worth the risk to her reputation of her method of acquiring new knowledge and enlightenment. However this may be, one thing was certain, viz, that the Ayah Churi Puri was her right hand both in the organisation of her congregation and also in the promulgation of those fresh developments of belief which her adherents were expected to assimilate every time a new period of study and new retreat had added a new wing, if I may so put it, to the already overgrown mansion of her eclectic faith. And it need hardly be said that, considering the important part Churi Puri had to play in the announcement of the new revelation, it was most necessary that she should be in close attendance upon her mistress during that period of incubation which proceeded its full fledged appearance. And indeed, during these periods of incubation Churi Puri was her sole attendant. At last, after giving to an ungrateful world some seven fresh revelations in succession, our distinguished prophetess was found dead in her bed, having been bitten in her sleep by a cobra. She was duly cremated in the midst of a large number of the faithful: and left them her books, her manuscripts, her religious

system and her memory and to her faithful Ayah a considerable sum of money in stock and railway shares: the bulk of her English property was entailed upon a distant relative. Such in brief is a slight sketch of the life and death of the celebrated countess D. who, however, is remembered among the faithful in Hindustan under a very different appellation having, it is hardly necessary to say, been deified under a sounding title signifying: The Everlastingly Fertile One and Pregnant Mother of Fresh Revelations. Such was the person, she had been already dead some twelve or thirteen years, who was the subject of the conversation between the Ayah and Chandra Singh in the presence of the statue of the God of Love: and although most of the conversation escaped me, it was easy to conjecture that the warning or revelation of the Ayah (whatever it was) pointed to some intrigue or illicit connection between the excentric English lady and the Pundit of Poojerabad about the time which, as we have seen, the gossips who pretended to an especial acquaintance with the secret springs of conduct of the great and powerful, pointed to as that during which he had most deeply discredited his name. It further seemed reasonable to infer that the Ayah's sudden appearance at the shrine was prompted by the apprehension of some sudden and public disclosure of the scandal and by a desire to warn the Pundit to be on his guard and perhaps to devise means to prevent the affair from becoming public. It also seems possible and natural to connect therewith the sudden love-affaire between Kama and Lasa which the Ayah had been first to discover. Whether and how far these surmises are correct the sequel will show. Here I have only to say further, at present, that after their interview at the shrine Chandra Singh and the Ayah separated behind the Mosque, after a delay which seemed unnecessarily protracted for a mere leave-taking, promising to meet one another again at the same spot in the course of a few days and then the Pundit betook himself to the tank and

as the threatening storm still held up, proceeded with his fishing. This time there was no nervous tremor as he struck the fish: he hauled out a fine brace at the first bite with all the precision of a master-hand. I noticed, however, that a strange change had come over his usually somewhat flabby unexpressive features with their benign simper of would-be saintliness. About the eyes, generally merely baggy and bilious looking, there was a blackness of the skin which was stiff and wrinkled like a snake's and a glamour of some unholy passion which whether of hate or of some less inhuman vice gave their possessor an expression that was half devilish half bestial. The lower lip was straightened out and two firm lines ran from the alae of the nose downward, bounding the cheek at each side of the mouth and giving the face a particularly cruel expression. Moreover, instead of leaving the tench to suffocate quietly in their own slime upon the dish as was his wont, Chandra Singh on this afternoon amused himself by scratching them with a hook, running it into their eyes and in other ways irritating the ebbing vitality of the poor fish from a mere wanton spirit of cruelty. Then, having flung me a broken piece of cow-dung to keep me from expiring (and he did it in a rude uncere-monious manner and not all with the deference that was due to my sacred character) he betook himself to his study, flung himself on to the divan, lighted the narghili, began to smoke it and as he did so fell little by little into a state of profound meditation. Here we will leave him for the present and put the time-piece of the narrative a few hours back to see what meanwhile had become of Kama and Lasa, both of whom formed the main subject of the Pundit's reflection. Having wandered about vaguely in the neighbourhood of the bungalow at Pindawar and rested under the thick shade of the champak trees during the earlier part of the afternoon the two lovers had gone into the house, for the sultry heat outside began to be unbearable, nor was there any need of further secrecy in their love-making, the Ayah having

informed Lasa, how well disposed the Ranee Ghotra Das was towards them and their innocent aspirations. Indeed, this afternoon Lasa brought a specially urgent message from the invalid widow-lady herself expressing in the kindest terms her desire to make Kama's acquaintance and promising to do everything in her power to further their speedy union. Kama had himself decided to open the matter that very night on the first convenient opportunity after he had returned home and Lasa was happy in the thought that she would soon be united for ever to all that she held dearest in existence. And here I wish again to point out how beautiful, nay, I had almost said how divine, this romantic love appears to me, growing up as it did in all the security and simplicity of a perfectly pure and blameless domestic life, as the very flower of its stainless innocence (for the lives of both the children had been flawless and saintly in every single respect), and now this stainless innocence was about to crown itself, in the natural course of events, by the highest diadem this world of ours can offer, and in doing so, to shed a reflected radiance and a mild halo of peace and joy over the two homes in which it had grown up and developed as in two sacred sanctuaries, suffused by the tranquil home-delights and the daily cares which make up the sum of earthly happiness. The widow had been charmed by the simple high bred manners and beautiful presence of the young Brahmin and had, as I have said, declared herself desirous to do everything in her power to help the two children to carry out what they had so much at heart. Indeed, she felt certain vague intuitions that she herself had not very long to live and was therefore almost painfully anxious to help on their union and to see her adopted daughter settled with a family which was so highly respected as Chandra Singh's in whose house her young charge would grow up (she felt a sure conviction) in perfect security, to all the duties and privileges of motherhood and a calm domestic life. Tired by the effort to see Kama and to welcome him affably she

had fallen into a kind of dose upon her sofa at the back of her large drawing-room whose folding glass-doors opened upon the verandah and looked out in the direction of the Mosque and tank of Poojerabad. The three pearl-like domes were just visible in the growing darkness—the two young lovers were chatting together more in the fore-ground of the picture (to anyone looking in at the drawing-room from outside the folding-doors) and Kama had promised on the following afternoon to bring Lasa a gold ring and he trusted also his father's consent to their marriage at a no very distant date. He would go into Benares in the morning and bring over the ring (if all was well) on the afternoon of the same day. This ring was to represent Ananda (the serpent of immortality) and should be of the purest gold with an opal-head and beryl-tail to remind them of the wondrous emanation the four-headed Brahm issuing from the statue of the blessed Vishnu: almost out of bravado Lasa had suggested a ring with an opal in it, to show how small faith she placed in the popular superstition that the gift of an opal brought ill luck, and how much in the one supreme certainty of Kama's impregnable fidelity through all imaginable æons of space and time. Affection had here said her last word and Intellect now roused himself and began to ask how much longer he was to be left in the lurch for the sake of his sister Passion. To satisfy his just demands Kama suggested a game of chess that wonderful epitome in a material and rationalised form of Indian metaphysics and mysticism, which in its modern developments, should perhaps rather be reckoned as one of the innumerable religions of the Western world than as a very ancient pastime of the Eastern one. As it happened to Kama it fell to play with the dark pieces, but Lasa had the first move and for a long time the chances of the game were so evenly balanced that a single false or even doubtful move on the part of one of the players would have given the advantage and most probably ultimately the victory to his or her adversary. So engrossed were the young

combatants, for in the absorbing interest of a game of chess or of his hereditary caste trade or profession and in these alone perhaps, the Hindoo does almost or indeed entirely loose the self-consciousness of which he is so constantly the victim, so critical was the position of affairs upon the chequered board, so aptly typical of our own mortal state on the chess-board of the world that the two children had not observed how lowering the clouds, how dark the air had grown, but yet, as if by a kind of fatality, the darker the atmosphere grew, little by little the balance declined in favour of the swarthy combatants, slowly but surely their ranks gathered round the ivory enemy, one strong position after another fell to them as the plan in Kama's brain was successfully put into execution, the championess of the white legions struggled heroically, but now the feeling that comes over a loosing chess-player took possession of her mind, a feeling almost of pain at the remorseless manner in which one by one her combinations were forestalled and rendered futile, coupled with a sort of resentment at being kept so long in suspense and compelled to die as it were by inches. But now her queen fell, exchanged, it is true, for a castle and a knight, the white king stood hampered by useless pieces in one corner of the board, and after a few more moves Kama felt his heart flutter with the prescience of his victory made the preconcerted move:—there stood the white king incapable of further defence facing the black queen who had dealt him his death blow. Just as Kama placed his piece on the requisite square a terrific flash of lightning glared out of the clouds in which it had so long lain dormant: and lit up the verandah, the room, the chess-board with a wild and lurid glow imprinting on the retinas of the occupants for one brief instant the three pearl-like cupolas of the distant Mosque and the white enamelled entablature of the tank and colonnades. At the same instant a tremendous clap of thunder burst above the house and the rain poured down in livid sheets of water. The noise of the thunder and

the sudden glare of light awoke the invalid lady Ranee Ghotra Das, who half rose from her couch pallid with a nameless terror which the sudden outbreak of the storm, the ghostly apparition of the distant domes of the temple and the blank faces of the children, gazing half aghast themselves, at the final and ominous position of the pieces on the chess-board had perhaps occasioned, unless the highly strung nervous system rendered doubly sensitive by her long illness, like those of a clairvoyant, had vibrated for an instant to the reality beyond the veil of things and had felt the presence and the interaction of the minds, whose will or at all events whose operation moved the pieces on the human chess-board and decided what their destiny should be. Not impossibly, perhaps, there was here in this elegant drawing-room of Pindawar, grouped as if by fatality, a strange sort of replica of the group we have described above in the shrine of Vishnu when Chandra Singh and the Ayah stood face to face with the wondrous statue of the god overshadowing them in the back-ground, just as their dubious and uncertain past was overshadowing the present. So, here in the confusion and in the sudden glare of the brief illumination, Ghotra Das in her vague blue dress, and half raised upon her couch with her hands above her head like a person just awakening from a torturing dream overshadowed the dark figure of the young Brahmin and the fair gold and marble outlines of her adopted daughter, while before them like an embodiment in a material form of the dreadful worlds and confessions big with fate-fragments of an evil past that had passed between the priest of Vishnu and Chandra Singh in the lurid darkness of the shrine, stood like a miniature repetition of the young players themselves, the pieces on the chess-board fixed in a last irrevocable position as though they had been turned to stone there, as though they were a petrified externalisation of the opposing mental elements of the two combatants whose inner consciousness was perhaps after all itself only the phantasm of some stupendous

game of chess far down in the hidden depths of all things, played by some irresistible power of fate or destiny according to rules and for stakes utterly beyond the ken of us poor humans, aye, even beyond our capacity to conceive. The dramatic ending of the game of chess also brought to a close the social afternoon at Pindawar, Ranee Ghotra Das was too much upset downstairs and sought her room: the Ayah was, as we know away, consequently, Lasa was obliged to attend her benefactress upstairs and render her such assistance as she required, Kama was left downstairs to hurry home as soon as the rain had ceased. This it presently did, the evening-sky partially cleared and the air was damp and fresh. As he was making the best of his way among the clump of the platanas, he saw a tall orange robed figure, which he at once recognised as that of the nurse, coming towards him, she beckoned to him to approach her, and with a momentary flash of her oblique lozenge-shaped eyes, whispered:—"Hasten home, young man, your father is already apprehensive lest something has befallen you: hasten home, for it is time." As she said these words she raised a fold of her orange covering and discovered perhaps by accident, the corner of an envelope she held in one hand. It flickered white against her tawny dress, much as the eye had flickered sinister a moment before. The action caused in Kama a strange feeling, such as he had never felt before, the sort of feeling or prescience of delight a person might be supposed to feel whom the force of circumstances has compelled to experience some wickedness he has desired to commit but has successfully struggled against with all the force of a well trained conscience. It was only for an instant. The next moment he was shocked at what he had experienced and broke away from the Ayah without more parleying. But as he emerged from the clump of plane-trees he turned to give a fugitive look backward and saw or fancied he saw a dusky figure by the side of the Ayah, she held out her hand towards him and something white flashed between

them: it reminded him of the lurid flash of lightning that had ended the game of chess so dramatically. And now, a sort of terror seized upon him, the panic terror that sometimes seizes upon a man walking along a lonely road or at certain spots in a wood at night—a panic terror that has its roots most likely deep down in human consciousness dating back from remote times of Nomadism or perhaps of semi or wholly animal existence. It refused to hear the voice of reason winged his feet and urged him over the road and through the wet fields of maize and rice like the scourge of the fabled Erynnēs. He arrived panting at the bungalow and threw himself down beside me for the sake of a little warmth and to dry his wet things. I did my best to comfort him and after a time he got up, went to the supper-room and took something to eat: fragments of the evening-meal which had been over some time before his return. Then he went to seek his father, break the secret of his love-affair and obtain the paternal consent to a speedy union with his beloved. Strange are the workings of the human heart and the interaction between mind and mind. Is it possible that deep, very deep down in the lowest substratum of his consciousness was just the faintest wish lurking hardly the least suspected even by himself, that his father might put some obstacle in the way of the realisation of his dearest hopes. Was it that the very ease with which all his desires had hitherto been satisfied had left an unrecognised craving for something to overcome which is one of the most powerful mainsprings of our worst vices and of our most heroic virtues? I knew not. But there the feeling was latent within him like a dream that has not yet been dreamt. Where it came from were perhaps hard to discover, but there it was and it was like the tiny grain of dust not the millionth part of a line in diameter that turns the scale in the balance of nature and brings about some tremendous physical revolution. When Kama found his father he was a little surprised to note a certain change in that worthy gentleman's demeanour. Chandra

Singh was generally suavely dogmatic and dictatorial and in the morning Kama had left him in a more or less depressed state of pensive melancholy which the good man considered peculiarly fitted to a saintliness of his magnificent pretensions.

His son perhaps did not observe the particular lines about the face of the Pundit which betokened a peculiar cruelty all the more remorseless because sanctified in his Reverence's opinion by strong intellectual, moral and theological reasons: for it was carefully masked by a joviality and heartiness of manner that was almost boyish and was totally out of keeping with the Pundit's usually staid demeanour. We see something of the same kind in the ruthless inaccessibility of the religious wretches who in the past justified the burning of judicial criminals, we see it even in the present day in the horrible Christians who attempt by elaborate trains of argument drawn from some imaginary moral science to justify the judicial butcheries of the guillotine or the gallows whose open air tragedies are so dear to the vile personalities of their abject apologists. The Pundit even in his moments of wildest abandonment was always consistently theological in his mode and habit of thought. This evening, however, as I have said, he had suddenly assumed a good deal of the manners of the boon companion and a freedom of speech and gesture which even in the eyes of the dutiful and deeply respectful Kama almost bordered upon the comical. In justice to the old Pundit I must say that hitherto he had toned down his latitudinarian morality, representing it as something exoteric in his instruction to his sons but now it appeared as though some power beyond himself urged him on to recommend all that was most opposed to his previous domestic teaching and to urge it with an alluring intensity that was very difficult to resist. By a strong combination of circumstances, accidental or the outcome of some other mind or minds, acting with a definite purpose, it was the very woman who had most deeply attracted him and

aroused the most violent passions in him in years gone who now appeared before him with a beauty but little impaired by time, preserved as if by some hateful magic for evil ends, and proved to him the irresistible, relentless, necessity of cutting short his eldest son's virgin love-affair. Yes, in Churi Puri, the Ayrh, the intense passions of other days seemed to come to life again. She was the embodiment of his evil past in all its past seductiveness that had unearthed itself and came again to earth like some embodied ghost, some vampire of the charnel, to hold him in its thrall and to constrain him to carry out its wicked will, which after all was perhaps but a ghastly fatality, the wan shadow of a process moving on and on in the hidden recesses of the Universe. There is a sort of contagion or magnetic influence in wickedness so that an older person fully charged so to say with vice, sets similar trains of emotion and nervous passion-tracts in vibration, to those, which are in action in his own person in others, especially in younger people with whom he is brought in contact. And in other persons who have too freely indulged their sexual inclinations in early or middle life a time comes when the distinction between love and hate becomes blurred, dimmed and at last perhaps even wholly obliterated. These people can feel love and pity for an object and yet hate it at the same time, for all three emotions are most completely satisfied by its destruction. All three passions work in fact in combination under the mastership of an intellect and will that have at last got the control over what before had been a blinding whirlwind of desire. In such persons the fatalism which had appeared before as though it were inseparable from the emotions, becomes transferred to their intellect and will, seemingly free in these parts of their nature, they move on as if at the bidding of some hidden power, with the slow remorseless resistless energy of a lava-stream, fusing everything in its own molten torrent and scorching up every vital organism, every living plant, every shrub that offers any resistance

to its slow, but inevitable course. Such a sinister influence as this it was to which Kama was now exposed an influence in the present instance rendered all the more subtly overwhelmingly and deadly corrupting because it was concentrated in the person of one whom the poor youth had been accustomed to venerate as one of the very highest types of humanity, to whom his creed taught him to submit himself with filial devotion, nay, with a blind submission as if to some demi-god or superior being whose very faults had thus been consecrated in the youth's eyes, whose will was held to be the son's highest law, and who with the deliberate consciousness of hardened volition and intellect now brought to bear upon that son's individuality all his varied powers, physical and moral (if they were not rather immoral and devilish) to mar and reduce to nothing his son's present felicity and to blur the stainless purity of his mind. And he did it after mature deliberation, with the firmest conviction that he was furthering the cause of the God of Love he served, that he was acting in accordance with the highest dictates of paternal duty, for the greater glory of the sublime creed of which he was the hereditary consignee, for the good of humanity and even for the ultimate benefit of his eldest son himself. For as I have said before, the exculpatory creed he had compounded to salve his own conscience and to flatter his own religious, vanity, had, when he saw how successful it made him, how popular it had become and what numbers of worshippers it brought to the shrine of Vishnu, gradually assumed the character of a revelation even to himself, and then, as this pseudo-revelation had been evidently the outcome of his not immaculate conduct in the past, partly a natural growth or outcome of it, partly an extemporised thing to palliate any little blurr or blotches in that past history, it threw a reflected halo upon that past life, which was justified as the parent of the amended creed: while again, his life with its complex train of good and evil had run its course as it had done under the shadow

of his hereditary Vishnaism, so that here again the creed and its outcome, his life's history, mutually propped, mutually justified one another, and all was very good. The Pundit wallowed in a boundless sea of optimism of which he himself was the light-diffusing centre—the Personality, which irradiated it all. And thus, anything which tended to tarnish the brightness and effulgence of that glorified centre piece—himself—was a thing to be crushed down and extirpated like some loathsome reptile, like some noxious blight, like some malign emanation of the powers of darkness—a thing to be smitten down by any weapon whatsoever, which he could find to hand. That was his very first, his most sacred, most elementary Duty. And here his religious vanity also drove him forward along the road which his past had rendered inevitable: and not only his vanity, but also his paternal affection and his desire to appear immaculate to his son, these last sentiments perhaps the least unworthy in the Pundit's complex character. To be a fallen idol in the presence of that son, to have to grovel in the dust before him, was an idea which positively made his flesh to creep, which filled him with a horror, as though the world were falling and dropping to pieces beneath his feet—anything he could endure but not that, and then his vanity came to his aid and whispered that, on the whole, his life had been a successful one, that he was on a fair road to popular apotheosis, even in his own life-time, and that no better fate could befall his son than to live as he himself had lived, to taste the heights and depths of the divine Passion in all its innumerable phases and so to develop into a worthy priest of the Blessed One—that God of Love from which, as if in sportive jest, the vast frame of things had sprung as the narghili smoke blends and wreaths, weaves and unweaves, in the heavy air forming a thousand phantastic shapes and figures and then dissipates itself and is as though it never had been. And deep down in the pundit's consciousness another and less worthy feeling prompted him in the same direction.

Without realising it, perhaps, he felt in the stainless purity and the genial unsullied loveliness of his son a sort of mute reproach and censor of his own more equivocal course of life, it gnawed and humiliated him without his knowing it and was one of the secret springs of that craving to prove himself infallible in all possible spheres of thought and intellect which was beginning to make of him a domestic autocrat and a dictatorial bore. And still further down in consciousness, aye, in the deepest abyss of all, like a Minotaur in its labyrinth, was that maw of animalism and cruelty which is part of our earthly heritage, and which now the force of circumstances had stirred from its long sleep—had aroused into form by the sophistries of his religion and intensified by long abstinence and the course of years. Now it craved recognition with the exigence of a master passion and dominated him with a delirium of delight to find that it still existed. Seeing that reason and religion, the preservation of his good name, his duty to the shrine, all pointed in the same direction, he would not hesitate to glut himself to the very full, to wallow in that thick, that cloying agony of passionate delight which had been irresistible in the past and now offered itself again to his eager grasp in a form and on an occasion when its fullest gratification was no longer hampered by any uneasy qualms of conscience but was rather imperatively demanded with adjuncts and circumstances of an intensifying kind it never possessed before—aye, imperatively commanded by the overruling Destiny of his religious Life-history and by the Evolution of his self-elaborated creed. And if we look at Kama's position we find very little chance of its being able to withstand the impetus of the Pundit's intellect force and will and the half genuine religious enthusiasm which inflated him like an air gun. For not only was he exposed to all the secret magnetism of the Pundit's evil nature, all the more deadly in its operation because carefully stowed away under its masque of saintliness, not only was he awed and predominated by

the stern doctrine of filial duty taught with such unbending rigidity by all sects of Hinduism and in his case fortified by a life's submission to a mind and personality: he had been trained to consider almost a direct emanation of the God of Love he worshipped, but as we have already seen, (oh! the pity of it), the very tenderness of his passion for the lovely Lasa had overflowed and been reflected back upon his own domestic relations with his father and rendered him more than usually susceptible to his father's influence, more than usually averse from wounding in the very least Chandra Singh's morbid and exacting pride and susceptibilities from running counter to any of the old Pundit's whims or desires. And then already the magnetism of that contagious poison or elixir of passion had begun to work opening out new worlds to his imagination and dwarfing and rendering insignificant the pettiness of his own virgin love-affair. Doubt, which after all, was, perhaps, only the sudden growth and blossoming of an intenser passion, that embraced both soul and body, now became clamorous within, the doubt whether after all that which religionism with its effete, artificial conscience, the heir-loom of more primitive social states than his forbade was so censurable after all whether emotions and passions which were so closely linked with a vigorous vitality and a life of purity, if they were not indeed its actual manifestation, should rightly be tabooed, ignored and trampled down at the bidding of this same effete, artificial conscience, itself the off-spring of centuries of lying, of priestcraft, of social cruelty, social injustice, social abominations of every kind, while reason and experience were both compelled to sanction what a priori conscience disapproved. These ideas already began to ferment within him, and to rend the unity of his consciousness in twain as the tiger rends the kid. And this is a problem which we of the Western World are by no means exempted from answering, behind all our shifty sophistries and shallow euphemism, lies the still unanswered problem not how and

whether we shall reject evil and embrace the good but what is really evil and what is good. This is the problem which lurks in the silence behind all the voluble chatter of our moral and religious systems and renders their threats and their cajolings so impotent and unavailing. For it is not true that the accepted or conventional morality is its own reward, it is not even its own justification, witness the joyous tranquillity and happy faces of those who have chosen some unrecognised mode of passing their existence, to whom the Orthodox and the Respectable with their sunny tranquil but alas! also grievously selfish and narrow happiness are gall and worm-wood, destructive not merely of any inner spiritual rapture, but even of the physical health and the right action of the operations of the physical body, witness also the numberless soured physiognomies and minds eaten up by ennui of the victims of social respectability which mercilessly condemns and refuses to tolerate, because it will not even look at anything of intense enjoyment that lives in the free air outside that glowing but diminutive spot of light its own exclusive existence. "My dear boy", said the Pundit with an almost broadly comic smirk of paternal benevolence, slapping Kama upon the back with his fat podgy hand, (Kama had already shot up a full five inches above his father's pericranium), "my dear boy, you look tired. Some little annoyances eh? I have noticed a sort of feebleness about you for some few weeks. Things happen. Everything is the operation of the Blessed One. A little ray of light streams down upon the wind-swept shallows of a stream. How it glows and glitters and sparkles, like a dream of childhood, like that wan bloodless uninstructional thing, our first love-affair, (here Kama winced), and then the thread of light steals away: the clouds condense, how the thunder roars, how the levin smites: what a glory in its sudden if terrific revelations. The mind expands: it has known passion: it has seen face to face. Vishnu, the Ever Blessed One, reveals himself in many ways." (Here Kama started: had

his father by some magic influence divined the scene in the bungalow at Pindawar that afternoon, or was it a merely accidental reference to the thunderstorm they had just experienced. However that may be, again that wild tumultuous delicious sensation thrilled his every sense that had for a moment intoxicated him when the Ayah in the clump of the platanes had glanced at him with her flickering agate eyes and had just let him catch a glimpse of the flickering corner of that mysterious white envelop big perhaps with some unknown fate.) "My father is all-wise, all-seeing, all-knowing", he replied in his accustomed formula, "I listen to the words of inspiration that fall from my father's lips." The Pundit continued with some animation:—"And again behold, it is a glade in the thick jungle. There is a roar that rends the very leaves at which the mimosa folds her sensitive fingers, a roar like a thousand cyclones, and like a flash of embodied lightning, a magnificent tiger has leapt through the fissile air, hark to the antelopes plaintive cry, hovering like a dirge about its already rent eviscerated body: the paunch and entrails lie upon the ground in the softest convolutions. But, hark too! above the rasping purr of the sated beast, a roaring and a crackling as of a million million fiends, the jungle is on fire, all the universe is a-flame, a thousand piercing cries from every kind of wild beast rend the air, lo! the tiger stirs not, but awaits the end, in her rapture at Creation's anguish, her own extinction is a rapture of delight. And again it is all Vishnu, the Blessed One, the God of Love, the alpha and omega of all existence. For the glory of extinction is also the beginning of reproduction and reparation." "Alas!", began Kama hesitatingly as the Pundit paused in his declamation to take breath, "these thoughts are indeed too deep for my poor intelligence, but I came hither to crave my father's consent ——" "Stay", continued the Pundit, totally ignoring his son's remark, brushing it aside as though it had been a gnat or midge that had settled on his nose, "stay: in mid-ocean I see a desolate

isle. A shimmer of white runs along its blasted cliffs. It is an island of lepers. Humanity that has sunk to be a hideous mass of formlessness—of embodied spectres. Even here rapture is omnipotent. They revel in the abandonment of their own corruption. Their death-in-life prelude to death's eternal leprous Queen teems in one perpetual orgy. Even here the Great One is Omnipotent. Nay, he is everything that is. Innumerable are the forms of passion and its gratification. Divine manifestations. Taste and know everything. It is ignorance that is the bane of our earthly existence. Drive it out by a complete experience. And bethink you, my son", continued the wily old Pundit in more solemn, less declamatory tones, "it behoves one who is marked out by birth and position to be a priest of the sacred mysteries to strive to discover something of that Power of which he is destined to be the minister and interpreter upon earth. Impious is that aspirant to the priesthood of the All-blessed One who narrows his mind to any thin streamlet of emotion, who does not bathe in the vast ocean with its myriad currents till his being, saturated in its eternal glories, fades in the presence of the beatific vision, his various experiences of earthly passion coalesce into one perfect whole, he is no more amenable to death and change. All this earthly, this perishable falls away, like the long buried corpse that is exhumed and exposed to the summer sunlight, he is the channel of enlightenment, the expounder of that all Perfect One that lives for ever, of that Eternal which is and is not." The Pundit paused, he had lashed himself into a state of by no means altogether spurious enthusiasm and had sufficiently impressed his son to prevent Kama from finding any words with which to reply to him. And again there fell upon him but more irresistibly than ever the new intoxicating, enervating passion thrill in which everything—power of resistance, sense of right and wrong, even capacity to think or act was absorbed and coalesced together in a formless mass just as fragments of lead are swallowed up when you throw

them into a crucible of the molten metal. All through his speaking the Pundit had hugged the recollection of his meeting with the Ayah Churi Puri (his former flame) at Vishnu's shrine and continued from time to time to dwell also upon the promised meeting a few days hence. This he did that to his words might be communicated some of the vibrations of that extremely earthly passion (I should perhaps, if I had not been speaking of so reverend a personage as Chandra Dhoondoo Singh, high priest of Vishnu, God of Love and Regeneration, have used a stronger expression), which he himself felt for the Ayah Churi Puri that they might set up similar vibrations in Kama's easily affected nervous system, and now, when he saw the effect his words had produced, he thought to achieve everything he desired by the help of a little pathos and by establishing close contact between his own passion-thrilled body and that of his son whom he wished to magnetise into a similar condition.—So dropping his voice and speaking faintly but with a sort of pedantically precise articulation that made him seem almost like an old man, he said with a wave of his hand:—"But let us drop all these high-flown topics and speak of practical every day concerns. And, what do you say? As the night is clear and fresh after the thunderstorm, shall we take a turn outside the garden? It is so hot and stifling within doors. Yes?", he asked affirmatively as Kama made a sign of acquiescence, "then you must give your poor old father who is not quite as young as he has been, the help of your arm." So saying he took the arm which Kama had dutifully proffered and not only leaned heavily upon it but also pressed his fat perspiring body most warmly and affectionately against his son's. And (with shame be it spoken) even muttered some love-formulas of a very oriental description in too low a tone to be audible, that the vibrations acting upon the unconscious brain-work might still further stimulate his son's already excited nervous system. "Intensity", he said at length out loud, pressing firmly against his son's side,

"yes, intensity that is so important, something that takes you below the surface of things, that mere rippling diletantism of boy and girl affection", here the Pundit paused and looked into his boy's eyes in a peculiar fixed manner as though he wished by that means to peg his words firmly into the nervous substance of the brain. Kama blushed, and then felt shocked at himself to think that a momentary transient feeling of shame for his love to Lasa had caused him to blush—but the word had sunk into his mind and stayed there as a stone sticks in the mud at the bottom of a clear pool of water if you drop it there. "Intensity, intensity" he kept repeating the word over to himself mechanically: yes, that, perhaps, was the secret of that sense of something wanting which both, he and Lasa, had experienced in presence of the wondrous image of the shrine: he was deficient in intensity: it must be acquired somehow. "Would my father tell me", he inquired timidly, "how this intensity is to be won?" The Pundit pressed his arm most affectionately. "My dear boy", he observed oratorically, "you will see. Things happen. We are all in the hands of Providence. The influence of the mighty God, our ancestral Vishnu, great Lord of Love, radiates from this his all controlling shrine, the centre of the moral universe: it radiates everywhere. It moulds everything to itself." Chandra Singh had gradually got into the habit—a very un-Hindoo one—of talking in this extravagant and exclusive fashion of the shrine at which he ministered: it was a sort of confirmation of his own self-apotheosis and half crazy self-adulation. "And now, my dear boy," continued the Pundit, "to come down to every day matters: I have a favour to ask of you. You know I was invited to be present at the wedding festivities in honor of Mohun Lal, the wealthy Rajah, at Benares. These festivities will be of a magnificent description: but I am getting too old for these frivolities (in reality he was desirous of arranging a meeting with the Ayah Churi Puri) besides at my age and with my growing reputation for saintliness it is

perhaps desirable to withdraw somewhat from the frivolities of this transient world—a mere nothing, a vain illusion in reality, a bubble that bursts and is as though it never had been. Moreover, my leg is a little painful.” The Pundit gave a pathetic little hop in confirmation of this perfectly gratuitous and unnecessary lie, for Kama was most willing to go over to Benares—indeed, as we have seen, he had intended to do so on his own account. However, the Pundit’s words affected him and he determined to do everything he could to comply even with his father’s most trifling desires and wishes. “You will have to stay the night: there will be fireworks”, added Chandra Singh with an air of assumed indifference: it was an anxious moment, he was desirous to be quite assured of his son’s ready compliance. There was a momentary struggle in the young Brahmin’s mind: he had half promised to meet the lovely Lasa to-morrow afternoon and to take her the ring and if possible his father’s consent to their marriage and now he would do neither but would at all events send her a message and explain everything. “Yes”, he said almost immediately, “my father’s will is my highest Law, it is a pleasure to obey my father.” And now again fell upon him that intoxicating passion, that delirious prescience of something, the intense deliciousness of which he had never so much as suspected even in imagination. The Pundit, having gained his point, now wished to cut short the interview as quickly as possible in order to prevent his son from touching upon the matter which he knew was still very close to his heart. But Kama was half bewildered by the excitement of the day and the interview with his father, so before he was ready with anything to say, his father added hastily:—“But, my dear boy, how late we have stayed out here talking. I must go and finish my essay on Prakriti and Purusha and their relation to the origin of the game of chess, pleasant dreams and all happiness at Benares.” So saying he reentered the house and shut himself up in his study, while Kama, after lingering for

a few moments in the garden, soon after followed him into the house and then betook himself to bed.

Trains of thought and feeling that have been set in motion during the day intensify and develop while we are asleep, and as our lives consist in a constant translating of thought into action it thus comes about that our dreams often have the appearance of being prophetic, being in fact links in the chain of phenomenal existence which constitutes what we are on earth. But in dreamless sleep, although unobserved, the process is in reality in more active operation than when we consciously take in what is going on within us. This night Kama's sleep was dreamless, and when he woke, all the vague expectancy and desire of which the Pundit had sown the seed on the preceeding evening was now advanced a stage towards maturity. He woke early and was already longing to be on the road to Benares and to enjoy—what he could not exactly say himself—but something which he divined with a fatal aptitude would utterly eclipse all of the delight and rapture he had yet experienced or even so much as dreamt of. In this nervous agitation of the passions it shocked him to be obliged to confess to himself that the thought of Lasa and his love for her was positively irksome, and it was only with an effort that he sufficiently controlled his impatience to be off to allow him to sit down and compose his letter of excuses to her for not keeping the half promised appointment in the afternoon: He intended to despatch it from Benares as soon as he arrived there by some letter and message-carrier of the city, not wishing that the servants of his father Chandra Singh should have their suspicions aroused. And to his praise be it said that letter was duly despatched from Benares, but it never reached the hands for which it was intended thanks to the watchful care of the Ayah Churi Puri, who opened it herself and then threw it into the fire, scarcely even deeming it worth while to remember the place and hour Kama had appointed to meet his darling at. So certain was the nurse that

Lasa would never meet her lover again in this world. And yet, Kama was not regardless of his love: his first care on arriving at Benares was to seek out an expert and skilful jeweller at whose workshop he waited until the ring, a beautiful piece of oriental workmanship, had been duly fashioned. The ruddy gold was wound in three ample spirals and then the magnificent opal head was reflected back across them to grip in his teeth of jade the ruby tail. Kama placed it on his own middle finger and then betook himself to the marriage festivities at the house of Mohun Lal.

* *

(Here is to follow a description of the ceremony.)

The bustling day of agitated and uneasy pleasure was drawing to a close at the house of the wealthy banker. The bride had robed herself among her maidens, the bridegroom and his companion had knocked thrice at the chamber-door to summon her and had then carried her, in the midst of a simulated flood of tears from her mischievous pair of eyes which, however, she contrived to keep perfectly free from any unbecoming redness or flushing—first downstairs after struggles of resistance of a no less perfunctory character than the tears, and then across the threshold of her father's house. Here a torch-light procession awaited her and the bridegroom to conduct them to the bungalow fitted up for their convenience in the ample grounds of the young man's father. An abundance of rice-seed was now thrown into the air, and various musical instruments twangled in various degrees of discordant music, and the doors of the bungalow closed upon the carefully inaugurated paradise of earthly love as the last page of a well-regulated three volume novel closes over its stale unsatisfactory solution of the riddle of earthly existence. Their disappearance into the domestic Elysium was the signal for the commencement of a display of fireworks, which, in itself a grandiose and majestic affair, was to prelude the eagerly

expected Nautch that was to crown the festivities and, it was whispered, promised to eclipse anything ever before seen in Benares. To Kama the long protracted marriage festivities had produced an irritated feeling and yet he could not disguise it from himself, that, when brought home to him in all its petty conventional details, the tiresome marriage ceremonial left in him a certain feeling of relief that he had not yet committed himself to be led with similar parade and pomp, like a lamb to the altar of matrimonial felicity. That some day or other he himself should share the same fate was, he well knew, inevitable, for the Hindu religion enjoins upon all the religious duty of matrimony with even greater fatuity and with much greater strictness than does the kindred Christian superstition with what disastrous results the over populated misery of the sun-dried peninsula too amply bears witness to. And after all, had he not done everything that the strictest sense of duty, love and honour demanded to save the lovely Lasa from all possible misunderstanding or suspense: to-morrow he should meet her again: everything would be as it had been before: this days festivity was merely an interlude, desirable according to the high unimpeachable authority of his father Chandra Singh himself for religious, esoteric, mysterious reasons, so while it lasted duty as well as inclination bade give their rein to the fleeting passions it inspired. And the passions it did inspire were of a remarkably vivid and entrancing description, for the Pundit and the Ayah Churi Puri had in their confabulation together at the shrine decided with the precision of two consummate military tacticians every step in the self-conscious drama, they were evolving so remorselessly and had bribed one of the servants of Mohun Lal to posset the unsuspecting youth's sherbet with something that should leave nothing to be desired in the way of exhilaration and entranced delight. So that it was almost with an agony of eager expectation and desire that Kama waited to see the first rockets burst upon the sight out of the deep tranquillity of the purple night-heaven, and he

dared not even think of what was to follow that fiery display lest his heart itself should burst at the mere imagination.

A display of fireworks affects the mind in a peculiar manner. The suddenness of the apparition excites astonishment, its brilliance admiration, its brief duration a feeling of sadness that all that beauty and splendour should be so transient, so evanescent. And its transitoriness is the more strongly impressed upon the mind by the splendours of the star bespangled sky, whose constellations it outshines in apparent brilliance for a brief moment, but then are as though they never had been, while the illuminations of the sky are to us unchanging and do in fact scarcely vary the least even from age to age. And when the first shower of rockets bodied itself forth on the velvet back-ground of the night in globes of silver, golden, azure stars that ran through all the gamut of the rainbow in their brief dolphin iridescence of dying life, Kama seemed to see in them an apt similitude of that secret sense of something wanting which he had felt at first in the shrine of the wondrous image of the God of Love, and which his last night's interview with his father had intensified and made permanent in his mind: a sense of something wanting which society with its shallow artificial life was quite unable to satisfy, and which perhaps was destined to rest unsatisfied through all the infinite cycles of time and space. And now more showers of rockets dangled and transformed themselves in the summer air into showers of orange green and purple meteors, and then more and more rose into the air, until at last they seemed to form one continuous stream of fiery jewels, breaking into a fringe of golden foam like a host of rebellious spirits striving in vain to storm the impregnable heights of Heaven. Such a blaze of magnificence could only be of short duration. It culminated in a glorious cascade of amber fire bursting as it fell into a thousand coruscations of orange and crimson sparks and then all died away save

one gigantic wheel of fire which as soon as the cataract spent its force and had even ceased to glow now rushed forward towards the spectators straight in a line to where Kama was seated, for he was in the the middle of the front row, being a particularly honoured guest, and it rushed like an avenging angel, as though it would smite him upon the breast, but just before it reached him, it was checked as if by the hand of an enchanter, its whirling vortices of flame that had scattered sparks in all directions gradually died away and disappeared, but as they did so, lit up a magnificently appointed open air stage with myriads of coloured lamps, beds of luminous flowers, interspersed with taller shrubs, also designed in flames of every shade of green and russet, while in the middle played two richly sculptured fountains alternately throwing jets of molten gold and silver a hundred feet into the love-sick air. Kama, more or less affected by the minute dose of the potion with which he had been hocussed, sank back among the velvet cushions of his chair and his heart almost ceased to beat, and then all at once it beat with the force of a mill-stream sending the blood rushing in cataracts of flame to his brain and through every part of his body not in one steady flow but in huge surges like the roll of the atlantic and accompanied by a peculiar never forgotten thrill of delicious agony such as he had never in all his life experienced before. And all at once this thrill intensified when with a shout of joyful gaiety and whirling a hundred tambours above their heads, a hundred lovely Nautch-girls sprang with a bound from their hiding places among the fiery flower-beds, and wreathed themselves in a supple dance of intoxicating delight. All at once it seemed to Kama as though he had not existed before, but now only for the first time all at once sprang into a state of unconditioned being like that of the intensely glowing showers of fire stars from the rockets, which bodied themselves with such instantaneous unspeakable reality out of the purple bosom of the night and then

melted away like the frenzied fever-fit of the homicidal maniac, when the fiend lets go his hold and the tense nerves relax unstrung. Mohun Lal had determined to outdo anything his predecessors might have produced at marriage festivities in the way of Nautch and ballet, and being an oriental of a caste of mind not inaccessible to western improvements, western civilisation and refinement, had decided that in his Nautch the dancers should discard the comparatively modest if filmy robes, bangles and womanly head gear of the Native Hindustan Nautch-girl and appear in all the statuesque and semi-nude purity of the Christian ballet, which had lately been introduced by a troop of true Christian missionaries, (from Leicester Square the choir angelic came), headed by their bottle-nosed acting stage-manager into the capital and dominions of one of the native princes of Hindustan. Beautiful indeed were the black-haired tawny-skinned orientals of Mohun Lal's Nautch, who had faithfully copied and adopted in his splendidly appointed ballet everything which the grossness of the western imagination has produced of more alluring and of sensuous than the less material eastern imagination had hitherto conceded (for the flesh was the flesh of the east, though the dress or no dress was of the Christian west) as they sprang into the full glare of the dazzling stage and formed themselves in groups of the most bewitching grace and suppleness, groups which almost immediately unwove themselves to recombine in other living arabesques of yet greater beauty and suggestive of yet more irresistible delights, perhaps in other worlds, but perhaps also in this. And then his namesake, the God of Love, a ravishingly lovely youth or maiden with bow and arrow in his hand and a cap of liberty on his head, stepped forward like an apparition from the glorious wonderworld of ancient Greece, such as we can dimly conceive it to have been from the relics of its immortal statuary, strung his bow and shot an arrow into the air. It rose heavenwards, like a lover's prayer, apparently in vain and fell to the ground again.

But as it fixed itself quivering in the earth, the earth too began to tremble, and little by little something like an immense citron or pomegranate emerged above the surface. Then the fictitious Kama took his bow and smote the citron with the string of it, dividing the fruit into two halves, and as the two hemispheres fell apart from the ensanguined pulp—sprang she—the long expected one, the most famous Nautch-girl of Northern India, most famous for the witchcraft of her intense terrestrial loveliness, most famous for the supple grace of her figure and its agile lightness and flexibility in every kind of dance and posturing, most famous in a word for everything for which a Nautch-girl, who has abandoned the dull respectability of domestic life for a totally unconventional unfettered existence, should be celebrated or at all events notorious. As she sprang from the ground the two halves of the citron disappeared mysteriously, and she was seen to be dragging along the ground a casting-net in which a number of small silver fish were enclosed. She opened the net, disengaged the fish from the meshes and flung them in all directions to the spectators. They contained comfits with an appropriate motto for the person to whom the fish was flung. So miraculous was her quickness of eye, hand and memory. Kama opened his with trembling fingers. It contained the figure of a pentagon under which were written the words "Mine for ever". The drug he had swallowed so unsuspectingly had now gained the maximum of its power over him, just as the golden goddess of the sea began her magic dance. She was a magnificent specimen of swarthy beauty. Wisely discarding the bangles, nose rings and other head jewels with which the beauties of India are too prone to disfigure themselves, she appeared before the audience in all the natural charms of her own loveliness. Her grecian formed head was covered with crisp Hyperion curls of the blackest jet that crowned the perfect oval of her swarthy face and the beautiful curve of her throat, neck

and breast, all of which were left bare and exposed to the public gaze, arms, hands and feet were also bare, but the rest of her body was tightly encased in a tunic and close fitting breeches to imitate fish-scales. It was wrought in pure gold. Round her waist she wore a broad crimson waist-band and broad bracelets and anklets also of solid gold round her legs and arms. Her brow was rather square and prominent, her eyes large and black, set somewhat deeply in the head, her nose was straight and short, her lips large, beautifully curved and of the richest blood-red colour. Everywhere her form was graceful, but rounded, full, firm and muscular. Such was the being who had been hastily commissioned by the Ayah and Chandra Singh to steal away the affections of the young Brahmin from the unfortunate Lasa: and the siren, who at the first sight of Kama accepted the commission on her own account with alacrity and applied all the acts and symbolism of the dance, to allure him body and soul into her toils, succeeded with a completeness and rapidity which must not be attributed to any heartlessness or vanity on the part of the object of her fascinations. Perhaps the keenest enjoyment such beings as this Nautch-girl experience is the delight of inveigling innocence and enjoying the squandering of it with artless passion upon themselves, and not only enjoying it but being well paid for the enjoyment into the bargain. But when the full tide of passion breaks upon a young innocent and inexperienced heart, such a one finds in the contemplation of its own destruction and annihilation a singular and inexplicable delight. Not that on these occasions the young soul consciously analyses its own feelings. Under the sudden spell of some master passion, the carefully erected scaffolding of the principles of a life-time crumble away, collapse and totally disappear as though they had been nothing but the illusive mirage of a desert, and in their place are bodied forth principles of conduct totally at variance with, often the exact opposite of, those they have so summarily supplanted—

bodied forth with an intensity, a reality, which completely throws their predecessors into the shade and often enough actually casts over them the very same slur of moral opprobrium, which the mind meted out to themselves. This sudden transformation of the moral sense at the beck and call of passions, which are simply the moral equivalents of a vigorous vitality and a healthy organism, throw great doubts upon the validity of our dualistic schemes of rationalistic morality with which we terrify one another into a perpetual oscillation between things sanctioned and things forbidden, to the grievous detriment of that life and that passion in itself which is of infinitely greater value than any number of moral sparrows. In fact, the distinction between right and wrong is purely illusory, as a very little reflection ought to convince even the most sceptical. For the notion of right and wrong in our minds is simply a reflection of the blunderings and tumblings which a quadruped imperfectly developed to stagger about on his hind pair of legs is the victim of during the untold centuries of the species infancy. Let the period of blundering and tumbling come to an end through the further and higher evolution of the animal and the dualism, that is to say, the notion of right and wrong will cease with the blunderings and fallings which originally gave rise to it. But the mental conceptions of the more perfect must assuredly be truer than those of the lower, hence it follows that our dualistic notion of right and wrong is the reflection of our imperfect state, that is to say, it is purely illusory . . .

A simple illustration drawn from nature may make this clearer. In some of the insect communities which, seeing that insects were evolved long before apes and man-apes, have had a much longer time to develop towards perfection, there is no such thing as party-spirit or internal friction, consequently all ideas of dualism which depend upon these particular imperfections must be non-existent in those particular insect communities: on the

other hand, among certain kinds of seals and among ourselves, the social organisation is so imperfect that in the former case an annual free fight for the females forms an essential part of the simple social organisation while we ourselves are only just emerging from a very similar condition of barbarous animalism. If then, to return from this digression, even among ourselves where ostensibly at all events a code of morality independent of familism and parent-worship is supposed to be upheld, we find that the landmarks of our conventional morality are often in an instant overturned and obliterated by the whirlwind of some sudden passion and a totally new, perhaps contrary system of moral landmarks put up in the place of them, is it to be wondered at that in a country where the rights of parents over their children and their claim to these children's love, reverence and dutiful obedience are insisted upon with such unbending rigidity as they are in Hindustan, I say, is it to be wondered at that when this primitive moral sense and Human Passion in its most violent form both pulled together in the same direction they should prove irresistible and bring about a downfall of simple human Faith and Love? I do not mean to say that Kama in the intoxication of this new Passion-Frenzy consciously analysed his feelings and his moral obligations and deliberately acted after mature consideration; what he felt within him was a warm glow almost physical in its intensity of passionate gratitude towards his father whose wisdom, fore-thought and parental affection had prepared for him this great unspeakable, this heavenly blessedness, compared with which all the Lasa's in the world were but as the thin ripples upon a stream of shallow water. And if the image of the poor broken Lasa, the tender floweret, which in the mysterious working of Providence under the dispensation of a God of Love, he had been predestined to crush and trample under foot, caused now and then a qualm of conscience at his treachery and infidelity to the poor girl, in the delirium caused by the drug, the excitement

of the Nautch and his own new immeasurably intenser passion for the seductive child of Liberty and Desire, these very qualms which he felt as though the very abysses of his moral nature were breaking up and forming themselves into a new, better and happier order of things, were themselves delicious, like the involuntary instinctive qualm of fear which even a courageous diver feels before taking the final plunge. And with this secret qualm, which was in itself delicious, giving as it were a certain spice and aroma to what Duty had called him to, another Passion stirred his heart, Pity, which was pleasant but not so pleasant as the other. The greatest of earth's literary prophets has told us that Pity is akin to Love and so it may be if, as some think, Love and Hate in their ultimate analysis are one and the same thing, but assuredly it is also akin to Hate. We pity a person for some innate defect or for being the victim of some untoward fate, that is to say, for some deficiency of mental or bodily organism, or for some feebleness of will, and what we are compelled to look down upon we are also prone to hate and despise, moreover, to many minds the emotion of pity is so unendurable that, the distress and pain of feeling it being laid to the charge of the person who causes it, the mind recoils from him with a sense of loathing and a desire to bury him out of sight as far as possible as something irksome and unpropitious. Kama felt these sentiments with regard to Lasa, but he also felt a pleasure in contrasting her condition so deserving of the pity he felt for her, and his own, standing as he did on a glorious height in communion with the stars, filled through and through with the intensest rapture which earthly Love and Passion had to give and the just reward of that Dutifulness and Reverence to Paternal authority which was the highest, the purest, the most sublime doctrine of his country and his creed. Ultimately, indeed, his pity for Lasa almost changed into gratitude, to one whose misery had been mysteriously predestined in order to intensify his happiness: perhaps something may be

done to make her lot less wretched. And then he gazed at the ravishing siren before him, who with gestures of an alluring, if somewhat equivocal character beckoned him along the path of Filial Obedience which he had so dutifully, so providentially chosen, and his thoughts lost all coherency, aye, his very soul lost consciousness as it blended itself with that new state of being in which he throbbed and yearned and trembled. Lasa, of course, was a thing of the past, that was perfectly clear and plain to his mind, and now even the very thought of her began to be distasteful to him, better far better to bury oneself in the glowing present, and to think no more of what the inspiration of his religion of Love and the luminous revelation of Parental wisdom, true affection and careful fore-thought for his own best interests and moral well-being had authoritatively declared was not to be. Such were the ideas and sentiments which from time to time in broken fragments passed across the field of his mental vision in the intervals when he woke up from his new eternal love-trance. Lest some of my readers should still find it difficult to realise a state of mind which is not the less faithfully true to nature, because it is no doubt far removed from their own purer state of Christian enlightenment, I must dwell a little more at length upon the Indian idea of Filial Duty: for it may almost be said to constitute not only the web and woof of religious but also of social life and thought in Hindustan. If we trace the chain of submission to authority which has been the bane and curse of Humanity for so many centuries of crime and bloodshed, we find that it consists of an unbroken series of links from the crudest primitive fetishism down to the most elaborate but no less barbarous succession Laws of any Conservative Country. In Hindustan or perhaps I should say in the Punjab, which early produced a race of poet-thinkers and philosophers, the idea of the Paratman or soul of the Universe and the Atman or individual soul being in reality identical early obtained a firm hold upon the

Indian imagination, and whether this blended Atman was looked upon as a Unity or Multiplicity really mattered very little, for the idea of Unity implies Multiplicity. Thus the perpetuity of everything and among other things of the ancestral Atmans came to be a firm dogma of Brahminical superstition. Thus also the reverence paid to ancestors was inseparably connected with ideas of reverence to the Paratman, Great God, or Universal Spirit: and sacrifices to the souls of the dead, offices in their behalf and all sorts of fanciful ceremonies and lustrations formed and do still form the most important part of Hindoo worship. Again the social caste system, originally perhaps due to successive waves of conquest, was at all events developed into the ubiquitous and mighty growth we see at present by an application of these religious ideas to the social strata which had settled down after successive tides of conquest had inundated Hindustan, else why do we not see the same phenomenon in the numerous other countries of the world which have undergone a similar experience? And then this caste system with its trade castes, business castes, castes of Brahmins, castes of officials, etc., all ramifying into innumerable subdivisions, each caste and each family of artificers handing down the secrets of his craft from generation to generation, each religious one his, as we have already seen in the case of the family of Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh, and so on of the rest has reacted apart, has intensified the familism which, at all events, helped to mould it, keeps it alive and vigorous at the present day, because complete solidarity and unity of interest between father and son are necessary for its maintainance. And thus finally as in the case with all religions and all superstitions, the whole structure of the social fabric comes to be appealed to as a practical proof of their divine origin, and human vanity sees Divinity at work, when in reality it is only its own diseased mind and will that are in operation. We see a good deal of the Apotheosis of Paternity in our own country even at the

present day. The doctrine that the parent may demand affection from his offspring for having amused himself by begetting them and bringing them up, and the notion that he has a right to their deep respect and dutiful obedience, whether he does anything to deserve it or not, are ideas still firmly held even by educated people of our own times. We even see something approximating to the rigid discipline of Caste, in our great families, in their family traditions, in their entail laws and the rest of the pernicious usages by which they endeavour to retain a power of life and death over a long suffering population. And having adapted themselves to the evil and corrupting system of which they form a part, they do everything they can to cajole or force their successor into the same false position, partly from the base and jealous wish they feel that sons should be not better than themselves, who in their own optimistic fatuity they conceive to be the highest types possible of humanity, also from a pathetic craving for the sympathy and approbation of their offspring and a lurking dread lest their own position and what they have done in the world may be open to criticism at the hands of their descendants. Now, if we can imagine heredity and entail not merely important factors in our social system but exalted to be the very pillars of our religious faith and hopes, round which the whole fabric of ceremonial has been built up, upon which it is supported, we shall gain some faint idea of the power and influence brought to bear upon Kama's mind by parental authority to constrain him to its ulterior schemes and purposes. What wonder then when to all this weight of authority was added the witchery of a seductive beauty which not one male adult Christian in ten thousand would have been proof against, even had he been already in love with as fair a piece of beauty and innocence as Lasa herself, what wonder, I say, if the spotless, duty loving Kama felt the innermost nature of his soul, that dew-drop of individuality and of the earliest child-life of the soul, dissipated like the morning-dew when the sun

arises? What wonder, if the whole scaffolding of his resistance to this new passion should so to say have collapsed as though it had been worm-eaten into a mere hollow shell?

The fireworks were over, the fountains of molten gold and silver played no longer, the gorgeously illuminated stage now glimmered but faintly where here and there a fragment of some arabesque still traced itself in flickering tongues of fire the scroll of night omnipotent now in all the power and majesty of its dark infinitude, even the human fireworks had given their last sputter and had danced away like fickle fire-flies to couch among the palm and myrtle-bushes, and with them the gorgeous daughter of the east, Empress of the ballet, and Queen of Nautch-girls, who had so swiftly ensnared the artless Kama in the net-like mazes of her airy dance, as swiftly as the twinkle of her own nimble feet twinkled over the tips of the grass until the very grass itself danced and quivered. Now, those softly receding feet, and the supple body in its fish-scale livery of purple gold drew him after it, as irresistibly as though she had been a retiarius of the Arena and he the luckless mirmillo entangled in her toils. Inch by inch it drew him nearer to itself, wilder and more wild his heart beat and flutured until he was no longer conscious of anything except his own animal life that seemed to throb and tremble as though it were the pulse of nature herself. But the supple figure in its fish-scale livery of purple imperceptibly slackened its pace, and then all at once as a moth may feel when it plunges into the flame of a lamp or a comet as it is absorbed by the sun's corona he felt that he was in her arms or she in his. It mattered little; she was his for all eternity, so he said to himself, so he believed. But before he could so much as kiss her hand she had slid from his eager embrace and stood before him in all her seductive grace and beauty, half defiant half amused. Then she seized his hands and began to pull his fingers amorously: but neither of them uttered a word, it was a passion that spoke in acts not in words;

and as she fondled his hands with hers she approached her face to his and pouted as if to kiss him and then drew back with a feigned bashfulness that half maddened him: then she stroked his fingers again and when he felt hers upon the ring that had been destined for Lasa he drew it off exclaiming:—"Take it, o beloved one, for thee it was predestined, not for her for all eternity; as the red gold glowed in the flame of the workman's blow-pipe, as the opal head grew to life under his dexterous fingers, I knew it was for thee, for thee, for thee alone for all eternity. Take it then, oh beloved, and pledge me thy word that we may soon meet again." The artful seductrice with many a soft manipulation drew the ring off the faithless finger of the young Brahmin and placed it on her own. "And you will meet me again soon", he exclaimed eagerly, "yes, you will meet me again, it must be soon, for I cannot be long absent from thee and yet live." "I go to a Nautch in the neighbourhood of the temple of the Blessed One—near Poojerabad, near your home to-morrow", said the Nautch-girl, "meet me at the shrine on the evening of the same day and you shall have all you can desire; put this in your mouth as you approach the temple, (and she gave him a piece of a gummy substance about the size of a marble and exuding a strong aromatic odour extremely agreeable to the nostrils), swallow it; utter the word Vishnu aloud and I shall be there." As she said the words she extricated herself from the too ardent youth's embrace and vanished like a will o' the wisp in the darkness of the palms and behind a bed of red flowering bananas. She was gone, and Kama was left alone in the darkness. For a moment something like a twinge of remorse at the consummated treachery to the luckless Lasa stirred within him, something like the twang of a broken bow-string sounded deep down as though it were far, far away in the depth of his innermost consciousness, as though it were the last fibre that snapt which had still bound him to Lasa and his child-love for her, if it was not rather the poor child's

own life that he heard snap and perish, like a feeble infant's that you strangle in the cradle while it lies there in unsuspecting slumber. But this feeling he rigorously crushed down, as though it were a disloyalty to his father and to the blessedness that father had prepared for a foolish and ungrateful son, as though it were an infidelity to the goddess of delight to whom his whole being was now for ever dedicated. He turned his thoughts from Lasa and tried to fix them upon this new Queen of his desire. But somehow this image of the beautiful Nautch-girl seemed to elude his grasp and this proved to be yet an additional delight, for the effort to concentrate his discursive fancy upon her intensified his passion, and all the while something like a pang between pleasure and agony seemed to stab him at the heart, until his passion became unspeakable, almost cruel, like a solid material thing, and this pang of rapture—he scarcely dared confess it to himself—was the thought of Lasa's agony which seemed now, as it were, to be the handmaid to his present bliss. "Perhaps it will kill her", he hardly said the words to himself; but at the mere sound "kill" a fresh series of pleasure-throbs seemed to thrill him through and through, he dwelt on the word and repeated it over to himself several times and a kind of ecstasy seemed to take possession of him. And again, the more he tried to concentrate his thoughts upon the enchanting Nautch-girl, the more the ecstasy increased, until it was like a warm sunrise within him and suffusing his whole being with a ravishing delight and almost intoxicated him with its rapture, as he whispered to himself that this ravishing delight in him was the agony at his loss which Lasa was suffering in herself and which was perhaps killing her. He sat upon a garden seat and scarcely dared to stir, save that his right hand from time to time moved mechanically to his forehead and then fell into his lap again, for if he stirred that perhaps would dissipate the trance-like ecstasy. And so the hours flew by. To passion loving natures there is nothing perhaps so delicious as this trance-like fore-taste

of the coming felicity, only there must be a certainty that desire will be crowned in the near future or the whole effect is marred. And then this pre-libation must not deaden the senses or paralyse the hand when the time comes to raise the charmed chalice to the lips. The hours flew by and at last, as a faint streak of light began to show itself in the east, Kama rose, quitted the garden, summoned some palanquin-bearers and allowed himself to be carried a portion of the homeward way. Then he descended from the palanquin, dismissed the bearers and after paying them, pursued the remainder of the journey on foot arriving at his home, the house of Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh, at about eight o'clock in the morning.

CHAPTER XIII

DUTY

Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh had just finished pooja in a satisfactory manner as his son rounded the foot of the hill on which he himself was standing. He waddled down the slight incline as well as his growing corpulence permitted in order to intercept his son who had not observed his father at his devotions. "My dear boy", said the Pundit, slapping his son on the back and puffing and wheezing, partly from the effort, partly from the previous haste with which he had descended the slope, partly from satisfaction to think that he had so dutiful a son, for a glance at Kama shewed the shrewd old physiognomist, how successful his schemes had been so far at all events. "My dear boy, you look charming; none of that feebleness about you which had caused me so much anxiety the last few weeks; I see that you are destined to become an able and worthy minister of our almighty God, and that you will hand down unimpaired the glorious religious traditions of our family, leaving a high and honoured name among the roll of illustrious Brahmins who have consecrated their lives to the service of the ever Blessed One."

"My father shows too much condescension and forbearance towards an unworthy son", responded Kama, kneeling and humbly kissing His Sanctity's fat podgy hand which the Pundit had obligingly held out for the purpose. "He is the fountain of all inspired wisdom, long may its waters fertilise the earth, long may I drink of its limpid stream." So saying Kama rose from his kneeling position and the Pundit continued as follows:—"It gives me much satisfaction, my dear son, to perceive in you both morally and intellectually all those important elements which go to the formation of a great and distinguished character (he said this much as a muscular Christian says to himself of the youth he has just debauched: 'we shall make something of him after all'), but it is well to sow when the seed is ripe and the season propitious, when the mould has dried, then is the time to fashion the silver vase upon it, and when Passion and Desire come, as they do to all, then is the time to consecrate them to the ever Blessed One that we may not be dead to his influence, but that he may live and work in us with conscious energy. I see that your heart is now malleable and open to receive the sacred mysteries of our creed, let us visit the shrine together before we take the morning meal, that, standing thus before the sublime image of our adorable Vishnu, you may receive within yourself some of his sacred grace and power." Kama of course assented, and the Pundit, with that roll of the lip and that peculiar fat swoop of dogmatic certainty which we have before noted as being so characteristic of those who are accustomed to handle religious mysteries, led the way toward the temple and shrine of Vishnu. As they passed the pillar, where the lovely apparition of the unlucky Lasa had first attracted the young Brahmin's attention and were just opposite the spot where the Pundit usually conducted his piscatorial operations Chandra Singh paused, glanced at the pillar and the soiled straws and leaves hanging from the weaver bird's nest the faintest flicker of a smile played upon his fat unpleasant mouth. "The birds are flown", he observed

after a pause, "as our thoughts shift and vary, so are the generations of the winged tenants of the air. Generation after generation they fly away over the earth and are seen of all lands, then they perish and other generations take their place. The nest alone remains and is repaired by one generation after another." "But let me pull it down and destroy it", exclaimed Kama in his loyalty to his father and his anxiety to sacrifice every trace of his first unsanctioned love-affair, "that it may no longer desecrate these sacred precincts." "Not so", observed the Pundit with an unctuous severity, for the sight of the nest awoke in him certain agreeable recollections of his meeting with the Ayah Churi Puri, and he by no means wished to see it destroyed. "Why should we inconvenience the poor birds who will doubtless return in the spring and would be sorry to find the materials for a new nest no longer at hand, or to speak more correctly at beak and claw. But come along and let us waste no more time in this foolish trifling." So saying, the Pundit led the way to the temple, mounted the broad flight of steps and entered by one of the horse-shoe shaped arches which bore witness to the Moorish character of the building and its Mohammedan origin. Kama followed him. Chandra Singh then traversed the vestibule, partially drew aside the embroidered curtain which hung before the shrine, and they were all at once in the presence of the God. Never had the image appeared to Kama so majestic as it did that morning, the dusky blue of the face and body partially revealed in the dim grey twilight which stole through the folds of the curtain and blended with the red light of the lamp which hung before the image and was never allowed to be extinguished. How complete the repose and yet how full of a divine vitality were the full rounded limbs, supple even in their marble rigidity, reposing in their eternal love-trance upon the couch of silken aventurine. And there, in the four hands of the God, gleamed the four mystic symbols of the divinity, the conch-shell, the lotus, the hammer and the ring, which last

began not with the religious snuffle of so many of our own divines but with a genuine humility and a deep feeling of responsibility, for this question of taking the life of a fellow-creature had been the subject of deep and earnest contemplation for many hours before he had arrived at a final solution of the problem, "we pray Thee, that Thy Eternal Goodness may so enlighten our understanding, that when, if ever, the wickedness or imperfection of the present corruption and the evil legacy of the past, can only be righted by the death of an Individual, we, Thy earthly representatives, may know when to strike the blow, that so our Laws and Justice may become the expression on earth of Thy Supreme Mercy, and that, when Necessity compels us to sacrifice a human life, our act may not be prompted by any vindictive feeling or any secret unconscious thirst for blood, but that it may rather be a copy of Thy perfect Justice, a reflection of Thine Eternal Love." So he prayed as many a Christian doubtless prays at the present day in his shallow self-conceit and shallow vanity and self-deception.

Then he rose from his knees, Kama did the same, and both silently quitted the shrine and its precincts and betook themselves again to the house of the Pundit.

It was one of those intensely hot days of summer, such as has been already described, when the human—even the Asiatic human—organism is capable of nothing but complete repose and quietude. Having breakfasted, therefore, the Pundit and his sons soon repaired to their several rooms, and Kama found himself once more alone. In the shimmering heat that soaked and penetrated everything his thought began again to busy itself with the beautiful Nautch-girl, and by a kind of conscious effort he concentrated it upon her charms until everything seemed to swim before him, and passion to concentrate about his heart until it was no longer blood but flame that circulated through his veins. But at last this effort of self-concentration and the heat combined exhausted him, and his mind again involuntarily recurred to Lasa. All at

once, like a flash of intuition, the thought occurred to him: "Was it possible that his father Chandra Singh entertained any idea of getting her for ever put out of the way by forcible means? Was that the import of the solemn prayer at the shrine and the strange miracle of the serpent's head moving?" Kama trembled. A little while before, in the garden of Mohun Lal, he had said to himself that it did not matter to him what became of the unhappy Lasa. But when the idea of her death occurred to him, not as a remote possibility but as a likely event in the near future, it did shock him in spite of himself; all that young vitality, that had throbbed and palpitated and sung and lived with the intense life and happiness of a glowing summer's day so close to his, that it had begun almost to form a part of it, to be put away, puffed out as remorselessly as one puffs out a taper when the sun has risen, that lovely form, to be consumed to wither, shrivel up on the funeral pyre, or perhaps to be thrust away a mutilated mass of bruised corruption, to welter in some well or hidden cistern; and his father to be the contriver of it all. And yet, oh no, it was impossible; such things could not be. What motive was there for such a monstrous crime? He dismissed the idea as if it were a morbid and impure fancy. But although it vanished from his mind, it left a tenderer feeling for Lasa than he had felt since the previous evening, and something like a genuine touch of nature, a genuine gleam from the child-life which is the articulate voice of nature seemed to lay itself upon his soul. The voice of nature which he had brought with him unchanged from childhood, that priceless pearl of the Atman, of the individual, again for a moment spoke in him as if it took a last farewell and bade exchange his passion for his love. For a brief moment last night's orgy appeared to him like a hideous night-mare, his father with his base intrigues and all the elaborate system of parent worship, ancestor worship, and the consecration of the social condition, these ideas at once evolved and were the children of, he saw

with the lightning flash of a sudden intuition, were but a hideous mass of fraud and mental jugglery. But the very effort of the intuition was its own death-blow; he shrank back, appalled at the audacity of a thought which all the instincts of his race and the moral teaching of his whole life compelled him to look upon as blasphemous and unholy. And then, as every nerve relaxed in the intense steamy heat of that blazing summer's day, the later passion for the child of Liberty and Desire again closed round him like the stifling atmosphere, that was almost too hot to breathe of that passion-stricken afternoon, brooded over him, absorbed him in itself until coherent thought and even passion itself vanished in the throbbing agony of suspense. And, after all, when all was accomplished that had to be according to that self-played game of chess, that process moving on and on deep down in the very depths of fate and nature of which our petty trumpery life or death in life on earth is but the shadow of a shadow, the mere reflection of an iridescence on the ripples veining the billow that rolls above a fathomless abyss, I doubt that, if he could have reversed the time-piece of his destiny, he would have done so and have had things otherwise. At all events, he said to himself, the die was cast, and when he thought how inevitable what he had chosen had now become, he was even glad that it was inevitable. So let us leave him. For now at all events we must put back the clock of our narrative some hours, and imagine ourselves at the bungalow of Pindawar, on the morning when Kama started for Benares. Here everything was much the same as usual, except that the widow-lady Ranee Ghotra Das was a little more ailing than usual and did not come downstairs until a little before midday, but breakfasted in her room on a small dish of curried rice and a cup of coffee. But when she did come down, the brightness and cheerfulness of her adopted daughter quite revived her. The poor thing was seated over her embroidery with a face of such cheerful contentment, so beaming with absolute repose and faith,

that it was impossible to feel melancholy in her presence. She was literally sunning herself in the happiness of her great love for the beautiful Kama, like a gorgeous butterfly that suns itself in the splendours of the morning. Not a shadow disturbed her blissful serenity, not one anxious thought her joyful activity. How her fingers flew over the beautiful Indian flower-pattern she was executing in silk and gold and silver thread, you could almost see it growing visibly under her skilful manipulation. Then she would perhaps lay it down for an instant, take up a zither and trill a few bars of some simple Indian melody; the words of which were generally the lament of some maiden deserted by her lover, or of some youth inveigled by the arts of some high born siren and doomed to perish miserably; for in the absolute certainty of her own perfect faith and love it was pleasant to contrast with it the fictitious victims of these love-sick ditties and so make the certainty of her own unspeakable happiness stand out, as it were, if possible, yet more solid and real and sure. One of these songs still haunts my memory, it was as follows:—

“Thine eye is a beautiful lake, lady,
That glitters all bright in the gloaming,
In it bathes the fond light of the stars of the night,
Of the stars in the summer sky roving.

And 'tis clear as the crystal of ice, lady,
And its depths are transparent as ether.
Youth, gaze not too deep, though the sea seem asleep,
There are many lie buried beneath her.”

But the claws of the chalk-white sphinx that menaced in the song were pared as the poor child sang it; the Medusa head was but a hollow masque, from behind which peeped her own fresh and delightful little face. Heard in memory after destiny or the evil contriving of wicked men's minds had shaped the course of subsequent events, these songs send a shudder even through my heart of flame, but as

she sang them then, they were but the expression of her own sunny joyous innocent child-nature, that thrilled and throbbed and palpitated like the collective life of the crickets and the butterflies and the grasshoppers that hopped and fluttered and trilled outside in the dancing sunlight of their electrical existence. Then she laid down her zither and took up her work again or sat down by the couch of the invalid widow-lady, stroked her hand, played with the rings on her fingers or prattled to her with a voice like a small bird's so clear, so limpid, so happy. And thus the hours flew by and the afternoon came. Now Lasa's cheerful serenity was exchanged for a more restless feeling, a flutter of agreeable expectation that was perhaps even pleasanter than the previous serenity, her heart beat faster as she thought that every minute brought her lover a little nearer to her side. And when a bird dropped a seed that it was eating, or a grass-snake rustled among the grass, or the Brahminy bull tramped down the slope of the meadow hard by, her heart gave a throb of yet fuller expectation, now her lover was actually there, in a moment he would be at her side. But the seeds fell, the snakes rustled in the grass, the Brahminy bull tramped up and down in a dignified manner, like a priest up and down his garden walk in the convent as he peruses his breviary, and looks slyly from time to time to see whether the peaches are yet ripe upon the church-wall, and Lasa felt ashamed at last of hurrying to the window at every trivial sound, and now little by little a touch of anxiety began to mingle itself with her happy expectation, and the anxiety grew more and more, and the hope grew less and less as the shadows lengthened upon the lawn, and the heat soaked and penetrated everything, and still Kama came not. She had laid her zither aside, for now the choking in her throat told that, if she essayed to sing, tears would come instead of tones and the flower-pattern of the embroidery no longer grew like the light for those poor fingers trembled too much to hold the needle. And yet she tried to master her emotion and to

look cheerful and composed, that the Ranee Ghotra Das might not be troubled by her distress. But the very effort to control herself for the sake of her adopted mother, made her still more pathetic. At last she could bear it no longer and went to her own room, with the marble bath in it and the couch, on which she had dreamt her first golden love-dream which had now vanished, perhaps never to return. And now her thought recurred with something like terror to the game of chess on the previous afternoon and its sudden termination; and the flash of lightning that lit up the mosque and the room and the chess-board on which stood the champion of the light fixed in an eternal check-mate by the swarthy powers of darkness and obscurity, oh yes, that lightning flash that revealed it all, now seemed at the same instant to have been destined to blast her own happiness and to turn her heart to stone. The very intensity of her faith and love, now that faith and love were shaken, passed over to the opposite extremes of certainty, that her despair was too well founded. And that despair deepened with every lengthening shadow that the platanes threw upon the awning above her head, as though it was a pall of ashen grey, strewn above a living corpse. Now all around her there was no golden vision of the sunlight that had fallen like golden strings that rang out in music as they touched the marble floor, there was not even the terror and excitement of the thunderstorm, but only the gathering gloom of death and indifference. It swathed her round in its dim folds, and then she said to herself that she wished she were indeed dead. But even as she said it to herself, she knew that it was not true, for tears gathered about her heart, surged upward and filled her eyes; tears of pity for herself at the thought of her own loveliness and all her young vitality consigned for ever to the gloomy bridals of corruption and the grave. And little by little sorrow had pity upon the broken floweret and rocked her to sleep with the dirges of its charnel house, to sleep as deep and dreamless as that gathering gloom of death and

indifference in which the poor child's sunny life was now plunged to fade and wither in neglect.

Meanwhile, the invalid Rance Ghotra Das, who had herself not been unobservant of her adopted daughter's distress, and had felt all the more for her when she saw how bravely she endeavoured to combat it for the sake of her benefactress, began herself to feel uneasy. Certainly, her grounds for being so were the slenderest, but none the less she could not shake off from her mind the forboding that some evil was impending. She had lived too long in India, that land of secret murder, she knew her countrymen too well not to be aware, without analysing the causes of it, that these half spiritual half physical phenomena such as had raised her apprehensions on the preceding day, generally presented themselves when some mischief was brewing. And when Kama never came nor any message, nor letter of explanation to explain the reason of his absence, her anxiety still further increased and she began to cast about in her mind whether she could do anything to avert the coming misfortune. And if Kama's absence aroused her suspicions what little she knew of the Pundit from hearsay and also from private information of her own by no means tended to lessen the fears she began to entertain that Lasa's love-affair was not destined to reach a happy termination. At last, in spite of her delicate state of health and infirmities, she decided that she would at the risk of her own life make some attempt to set things to rights. She had a growing presentiment that she herself had not long to live, and if by shortening her own life a few weeks or months she could make sure of her adopted daughter's future and see her settled happily, she thought that it would be well worth the sacrifice. Accordingly, she summoned her servants and ordered them to bring her palanquin, as she was determined to visit Chandra Singh herself and find out what chance there was of obtaining his consent to the marriage of her adopted daughter with Kama. At any rate, it would be infinitely better to know the worst than

for her daughter to be left any longer in her present cruel state of suspense and suffering. The palanquin was brought then and the invalid lady assisted into it, and the palanquin-bearers were ordered to carry her with as little delay as possible to the Pundit's house at Poojerabad. While she is on her way thither, we may as well take a look at the Pundit and try to clear up anything that may be at all enigmatical in that admirable Brahmin's state of mind and conduct. It will be remembered, that after his first interview with the Ayah Churi Puri at the shrine of Vishnu he had retired to his study, and there remained for a long time in deep meditation. It was the past in all its evil pleasures and all the still more evil consequences of those pleasures that had confronted him in the person of Churi Puri, evil that had been only half repented of and was sweet in its sudden resurrection from a dead and buried past and in the rapture of its renewal, evil that was perhaps still sweeter than before, because it must be enjoyed furtively, that no shadow might fall on the credit of his family and on his own rapidly growing reputation for saintliness and asceticism; evil that was sweetest of all when he perceived that time had not one whit diminished the cloying delirium of its charnel house delights. But it was not the Ayah herself but what she had to reveal, that filled him with the greatest anxiety and apprehension. We have hinted vaguely at what it may have been; but whatever it was, one thing had been impressed upon his mind as though it had been branded there by a sudden flash of lightning, not only must Kama's love-affair with Lasa be nipped in the bud, it must be rendered utterly impossible that they should ever by any possibility meet again in this world. But it was when the Pundit began to consider how this should be achieved that his difficulties began. Upon the passionate natures of the East a disastrous love-affair does not act as in our colder climates, it may prove rapidly fatal not only to health and peace of mind but to life itself: Chandra Singh loved his son too fondly to dare forbid

him suddenly and without any reason to renounce his hope of marrying Lasa, and yet, the affair must be put a stop to, at once put a stop to in such a way that it could not by any possibility be renewed. The usual western expedient of sending his son away for a time was on the same grounds out of the question. If again he were to give his reason for sternly forbidding any further association with Lasa, he would have to bring into the light of day certain passages in his own life, which he would not for the whole world have his son know anything about. He would not voluntarily allow himself to become a fallen idol in that son's esteem, the thing that of all others he most dreaded even to contemplate as remotely possible. And then what good would it do? It would not in the very least mitigate the shock to Kama's feeling, nay, it would rather intensify the evil consequences to be apprehended from putting a stop to the affair. Let alone the credit of the family religion, his religious teachings to his sons, and the influence of the blessed creed it was his privilege and duty to hand down to future generations, and to uphold unsullied before the world a direct and peremptory veto of any further love-making would be far better than any scandal of that kind. But even if such a veto were not to prove fatal or injurious to Kama's health and peace of mind, perhaps even to his very existence, was it perfectly certain to be obeyed? Or rather was not the Pundit himself here upon the horns of a dilemma. If Kama bore the shock without physical or mental injury, was he not certain sooner or later to disobey, if he did not disobey would it not be because the vitality and elasticity of his nature had received a fatal blow? All these reasons had driven the Pundit to decide upon some more decisive mode of action. The Ayah Churi Puri had herself hinted something about a substitute and had indicated not obscurely the particular substitute she would suggest. And here the Pundit's own overweening vanity and his desire to feel himself on a perfect equality with his own son as regards

moral conduct came to the Ayah's aid to fortify her suggestion. The Pundit rubbed his hands and said to himself that he would indeed make a splendid fellow of his son—he should be a second Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh. And again the religious sophistries of his whole life-time came to the aid of his vanity, and declared to him that the course he proposed to take was what the highest transcendental interests demanded. Indeed, it was not very long before he felt quite certain that the suggestion was a direct monitor and intimation from the Almighty Vishnu himself. But still it did not altogether allay his apprehensions. There was not that logical completeness about it, which in the particular circumstances of the case was an absolute necessity for his future peace of mind. Who could guarantee that Kama might not, would not sooner or later tire of his new passion and return to his old love? Indeed was it not on the whole likely that, when this new passion had spent itself, the old child-love would reawaken in a heart no longer a boy's but a man's, capable of forming fixed resolves and carrying them out with steady inflexible pertinacity and determination? But if Lasa could by some means be eliminated? After this second love-affair her loss would not be fatal to his son, whose feelings would have been deadened, the virgin life, the intense individuality of the child-love and the child nature would be at an end for ever, and Kama would continue to solace himself with what he could get, passion, as the more ethereal, less earthly virgin love had eluded his grasp for ever. Soon the very remembrance of its sweet brief morning-dream would vanish away and cease to interfere with the more intoxicating passion for which it had been exchanged. To eliminate Lasa? The idea, for reasons which the reader may perhaps conjecture, caused first a thrill of terror and a shudder of horror to vibrate through the Pundit's obese and oily body. He had seen her at times, this light airy sylph-like being as she hovered about the colonnades of the tank or wandered like a young

roe-deer among the fields of maize and rice; and his heart went out towards her with a glow of genuine paternal affection. In destroying her he would rend and mutilate his very vitals, his own very heart strings. But if his own son's peace of mind, perhaps his life demanded the sacrifice, if the credit of his blessed religion of Love and Regeneration, if the great Law of Parental Authority and his own credit with his offspring all pointed in the same direction, all demanded the sacrifice, who was he that he should oppose his own feelings to the one solution of the difficulty which was final; complete and impregnable and which the god himself seemed to point out? And was it not perhaps a kind of penance on his past misdoings, that to safeguard the vital interest of which he was the guardian, he should be compelled to take part in the dreadful sacrifice of a virgin life and wring his own heart strings in the awful tragedy. At any rate, the logical consistency of his life and his ideas called aloud that he should not shrink like a weak-kneed sentimentalist from the task. And then, after all, was it not the truest mercy to the unhappy Lasa herself to transfer the poor broken life from the plane of earthly existence to a purer, a better, a more spiritual one, to save her from any possible disclosure and from learning who her lover really was. In using this argument Chandra Singh reasoned very much as the excellent if muddle-headed scientific Christians argue when they attempt to reconcile capital punishment with a religion of Love and Mercy; but it must be admitted that he stood on much firmer ground than do these visionaries, for according to the religious point of view Lasa was certain to be benefited by the change. Indeed, these good peoples' attempts at reasoning, if consistently and logically carried out, would very soon depopulate the world. At this point in the Pundit's reflection, when the poor little child's life was trembling in the balance, and a grain of dust on one side or the other would have turned the scale, the deep seated cruelty which underlies all human existence and

which had been stimulated and roused from its torpor in the Pundit's case by his contact with the Ayah Churi Puri, now insinuated itself like the thin edge of a razor into the Pundit's consciousness, and in so doing inclined it towards the more drastic remedy. The half decision unconsciously arrived at manifested itself as a faint smile or ghost of a smile, mingled with an intangible feeling of pity that died away as it was born. These feelings played about his heart-strings and caused partly a sensation of amusement, partly one of discordancy and irritation. Here the Pundit threw or rather rolled himself upon his knees and prayed for grace and enlightenment with a genuine fervor and earnestness, which would have done credit to any Christian. The prayer was in effect very similar to the one recorded at the shrine with Kama. And the enlightenment came or at least something the Pundit interpreted as such; it was a sudden surging upward of all the cruelty of his own animal nature, the vulture's beak within that rends and ravens and gluts itself in destruction, and that feels a delight in death and carnage. It came upon him like a sudden spasm of delight. Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh knelt there entranced. Yes, it was a sign he had prayed for so earnestly; the Blessed One spoke to him in the language of human passion, revealed to him the mighty mystery that cruelty is sometimes the highest mercy and proclaimed his divine will that it—the thing Chandra Singh had in mind inevitably was to be. Henceforth the Pundit never swerved one iota from his fell design. Nay, having the sure and certain conviction of the divine approval, he gloated over the idea of Lasu's agony, pictured her death-struggle, thought out with conscientious exactness every move in the game, which was to end with her extinction, and even succeeded in extrancting a secret pleasure out of the peculiarly revolting and unnatural circumstances of her destruction at his hands. And these thoughts continued to gain a hold upon him the more he dwelt upon them, the more he elaborated them in his mind, so that at last

the religious and transcendental reasons for the sacrifice receded into the back-ground, and the mere brutal thirst for blood urged him on with fatal force, all the more inevitably and inexorably, because he deliberately submitted to it as the voice of his conscience and of his god. Such was the dastardly treachery and insane inhuman cruelty to which Chandra Singh's easy-going religion of sexual love, his large-minded tolerance, his euphemisms and his desire to stand well with the world and hush up misdeeds, and his genial forbearance towards a forgiveness of his own and other people's peccadilloes had step by step conducted him. It was the logical, the necessary outcome of all his past history which was itself again the outcome of his creed. To himself he seemed to have no choice—and his whole life and antecedents forbade him from looking at things differently—no choice but between the infamy of a cruel and unnatural murder and the permission of an infamy which was perhaps worse and which might end by bringing about horrible disclosures. And here we have in miniature a picture of our own religious history and the false civilisation it has evolved. Sooner or later, as civilisation grows more complex, the evils and vices of the past revive again with a force and violence tenfold greater than before after a long abstinence and a long sleep of ages, and religion, bewildered and appalled at its own impotence and half blinded by the consciousness of its own faulty and imperfect record in the past, imagines there is no alternative but an unsparing remorseless system of cruelty and a rigorous repression or else an easy-going condonation of vice. And then the deep-seated ferociousness of our nature—the legacy from a semi-brutal past and a semi-bestial stage of existence—turns the scale, human nature sees in its own most inhuman passions a revelation from on high: cruelty and intolerance obtain the sanction of religion and society and intensify the very evils they were intended to allay. For that other deep-seated instinct in our nature which is not

brutal but divine, the reflection of the sunlight and the glorious form and powers of external nature which has been evolving in the race for countless æons of open air existence into the passionate adoration of freedom and love, and all that is beautiful and romantic. revolt against the shallow cruel prudence of the faithless creed of night, its insane historical beliefs and dogmas which reason has long ago rejected as untenable. Religion in its turn, stung by what it considers a shameful apostasy accords a half contemptuous tolerance to the "weaker vessels", "saved as it by fire", who, poor things, are incapable of reviving the higher mysteries, that is to say, who are incapable of drilling their reason into the religious "nonsense that never could be understood", and the issue of this insane contest is too often that the more enlightened party, stung in its turn by finding itself an object of patronising pity at the hands of those, who are in reality so much its moral and intellectual inferiors, flings overboard wholesale, principles of morality which have been hitherto inseparably connected with the creed, and which its intolerance now discredits in their eyes. But no body of moral and religious truth, however absurd the dogmas may be, can be altogether false, it more or less represents collectively the experience of ages of practical life and the wisdom of gifted individuals. Faith in love and freedom and beauty thus in its turn becomes discredited, and the religious fanatics triumphantly proclaim that no morality can subsist long without the sanctions of their own creed, witness the excesses of those who have rejected it, and thus they adroitly manipulate the very evils their own unreason and their own intolerance have pushed to extremes, to bolster up and justify that intolerance and that unreason. And thus religious and legal cruelty and religious and legal intolerance regain the day. But an atmosphere of cruelty and intolerance is just the very one in which the crop of vices they are intended to cope with breed most rankly. Thus a perpetual dualism is set a-going, the mind of the individual

is ballotted about from excess of freedom to excessive restriction, society is broken up into warring factions, and an insane spirit of party-hatred splits the corrupting body politic into two opposing hosts.

But to return to my narrative from this digression. The Pundit was in his study elaborating his essay upon the national game of chess and its relation to the metaphysical doctrines about Purusha and Prakriti, the two primitive forms out of which the phenomenal or Illusory Universe has been evolved. From time to time he put down his pen and his thoughts run off to that other human or rather inhuman game of chess which he and the Ayah Churi Puri were playing so remorselessly, and from time to time as he frowned with his bilious fishy eyes or pulled the grisly wisps of his coarse moustache he muttered to himself:—"The poor, poor little creature, yes, it might happen thus. Or, why shouldn't we do it so", precisely as though he were thinking out a neat and elegant check-mate in a game of chess. The arrival of the widow-lady Ghotra Das interrupted these ruminations. He hurried to the door and helped the widow-lady out of her palanquin with the high-bred, self-possessed courtesy and grace which is the inalienable birth-right of the inhabitants of Hindustan. "Whatever be the occasion of the Ranee Ghotra Das's visit to my house", he said, bowing with as much elegance as his growing corpulence would permit, "I shall ever be grateful to it for giving me the opportunity of forming the acquaintance of so amiable and accomplished a lady. Permit me to show you the way", he continued as he led her towards the reception-room of the house. "The occasion of my visit", said the invalid widow-lady, following him, "cannot but be flattering to yourself, for it is prompted by the desire that I and my adopted daughter should be more intimately connected than by mere proximity with a family of such high repute for the soundness of its religious opinions and for the conscientiousness with which it lives up to those opinions as your own. Although I myself belong to

one of the branches of the Somaj, I cannot withhold my respect and admiration from the higher forms of the worship of Vishnu and their sublime inculcation of the Law of Love and Mercy." Something in this speech jarred upon the Pundit's sensibilities; there was just the slightest touch of patronage about it, and moreover considering the very peculiar way in which his religion of Vishnu was meditating a manifestation of Love and Mercy it sounded perhaps unintentionally ironical. So he replied in the didactic manner so common with the Hindoos. "When the mind is occupied in discussing some matter of importance, it is well that the body should be in repose. Let the Ranee Ghotra Das be pleased to honour this divan (he pointed to the couch or sofa) by giving it the grateful task of supporting her distinguished person." The widow-lady accepted the invitation and beckoned to the Pundit to take a seat beside her, which after a certain amount of polite protestation he consented to do. "You are doubtless aware that I have an adopted daughter", begun Ghotra Das, "who is as dear to me as though she were my own child . . ." "I have seen her myself many times about the tank and colonnades; a lovely floweret, a charming child of nature and of Vishnu," exclaimed the Pundit, interrupting her enthusiastically, a tear of warm hearted emotion glistening in the eye nearest Ghotra Das, like a concave lens of solidified gun-mastic, for the lachrymal glands had secreted sufficient fluid to be observable, but not enough to form a drop. "And this beautiful creature wishes to become a convert to the glorious religion of the Blessed One. I should indeed be most happy to initiate her." "She does indeed desire", said Ghotra Das, "and I myself desire also that she should form a tie which would, I have no doubt, necessarily imply a conversion. That would follow as a matter of course. I thought it right to come to inform you that your son visits very frequently at our house. I trust that it is done with your full consent." "But my dear lady", responded the Pundit, "how should I object

to this intimacy with so charming, so distinguished a person as yourself." Ranee Ghotra Das felt a certain vexation cross her mind, the Pundit's remark sounded almost sarcastically in her ears. "You must be aware," she responded somewhat curtly, "what the object really is that attracts him to our house." "It is indeed an enigma to me; what I have suggested appears to me an all sufficient reason", replied Chandra Sing bowing. "In brief then", said the widow-lady, "he is desirous of linking himself by marriage with my adopted daughter. They have my fullest consent. There is no youth I should better prefer to see my daughter married to than your adult son. No family in whose hands I should leave her with more complete confidence than your own." There was a pause. The Pundit rubbed one knee and then his nose and then looked at Ghotra Das with a peculiar furtive half enquiring smile as much as to say: 'I know all you tell me, but go on.' "Although my adopted daughter is illegitimate in the eyes of the Law," continued the widow-lady, "and only half Asiatic by birth, she is of high distinguished lineage on the mother's side, who was a European, and we have every reason to believe on the father's also." The Pundit again paused and gave an awkward little cough. It was a difficult, a delicate matter to prevent more tiresome palavering, by giving Ranee Das just the faintest flicker of a hint of what was destined to be without sufficiently putting her upon her guard to make her take any decisive steps to prevent it. Even if she should guess too much, thought the Pundit to himself, what matter? If the worst came to the worst. *That* could be so very simply arranged. There are means. Things happen. It is sometimes dangerous to be too quick-witted in Hindustan. "Vishnu, our mighty Lord, the ever Blessed One", replied Chandra Singh at length, "is a God of Mercy and Loving-Kindness, but he is also stern and unbending in his decrees. When the lotus-flower has perished, it can be no more renewed." There was nothing in these words which need have aroused Ghotra

Das's apprehension; all they seemed to imply was merely that Lasa and Kama could never be permitted to marry. But with that extraordinary clairvoyancy and penetration which occur in some diseased states of nervous irritation, Ghotra Das had by a flush of sudden intuition caught a glimpse of the murderous purpose lurking like a fiend at the bottom of the Pundit's thought. Perhaps a certain curl of the lip and a darkening about the eyes together with a peculiar leathery look upon the rounded heavy corners of the mouth and the outer angles of the eyelids, an appearance difficult to convey an idea of by description to a reader who has not seen it, helped to betray the secret mischief that was brewing. "Oh no, not that, not that. That is too horrible. Have you no pity?", she exclaimed, roused out of the conventional phrases of ordinary conversation, "what can that profit your god and your religion. What cause is benefited by secret murder and by deeds that shun the light." "My dear lady", replied the Pundit blandly, "what extraordinary illusions are these that you have got into your head. I express by a very ordinary phrase the impossibility that your daughter and my son should ever be united in marriage, and all of a sudden you imagine all sorts of secret machinations and villainies at the bottom of it all. Such things do not happen in our enlightened days. Be assured that nothing happens without the ordering of a Divine Providence. Rest assured in the certain hope, that a Deity of boundless benevolence will never allow even a hair of the head to be injured of the innocent and unoffending." But Ranee Ghotra Das shook her head, she had read the Pundit's thought too clearly to be hoodwinked any longer, and Chandra Singh perceiving this now, thought it better to reduce her to a state of inanition and despair, by letting her see her own powerlessness in his hands, and how hopeless it was for her to struggle against a destiny which was being prepared with the remorseless precision of a game of chess. "My dear lady", he began with a sort of sleekness and a peculiar gent-

leness of intonation, which made her shudder far more than if he had spoken roughly to her, "everything works itself out and is being worked out with unerring wisdom, (he never could entirely divert himself of the idea that existence was a sort of mathematical problem which it was his function to solve by treating all about him as so many pieces in a game). What are we all but motes in the sunshine. One appears, sparkles an instant and then is seen no more. Is it not so? The Great One has spoken: 'The ever Blessed One has shewn his power who is merciful in destruction as well as in the gift of life. I catch the cricket in the fields; in its agony and terror it sheds its two legs on which all its activity and joyful existence depend, it crawls away among the grass to live a death in life, to perish slowly and miserably; but in its happy flight above the fields, in the full tide of its illusive existence, wallowing in its sea of sunshine, it is caught and devoured by the swallow and passes from existence to existence. Is not Vishnu mighty Lord of Love and Regeneration in the boundless field of Nature, wiser and kindlier than we with our narrow selfish love and our narrow save-all mercies.'" Ranees Ghotra Das looked at the Pundit and at his fishy eyes which now darkened with a peculiar venom. She felt her own powerlessness, much as those are said to feel who see the cannon ball rushing forward to destroy, and yet are incapacitated by some attractive force upon the nerves from moving a single inch to get out of its way. "Oh, spare her, spare her", was all that she could say. Then she collected enough self-possession to add:—"You shall never see us again; we shall leave Pindawar; your son shall never meet Lasa again in this life." "The safeguarding of our blessed faith forbids us to be content with any such shifty expedients", replied the Pundit slowly but deliberately, "who can follow the flight of the arrow from the bow of Love, now it strikes, now it misses; again it strikes and the wound seems healed, but after many years bleeds afresh; who can guarantee that two young lovers should never

meet again in this life. Life is long, the time of us older ones on earth is perhaps but as brief as it is uncertain. Our wills will soon be forgotten things, and lie in the grave inoperative." The Ranee Ghotra Das was not altogether ignorant of certain of those equivocal passages in the Pundit's life to which attention has been already drawn, nor was she unaware of his extreme anxiety to keep them in the back-ground, and when he shewed such a remorseless cruelty in his determination to carry out his hellish design against her adopted daughter, she partly divined the cause. A bright inspiration seized her. "If, as seems to be the case", she said, "there is any overwhelming reason why Kama and Lasa should no longer meet, I have a proposal to make, which I think you might consider sufficient. I know many influential Feringhees in Benares and Calcutta, and could, I have no doubt, succeed in having her sent before many weeks are over to some home in England, there she would no doubt soon adopt the beliefs and customs of our rulers, with her singular beauty she would not fail to find some other lover, she would marry a Feringhee and all possibility of what you fear would be for ever at an end." If this proposal would have been made some days earlier when the Pundit's horrid design had been more or less prompted by something he conceived to be a sense of duty to himself, to his Religion and to the Moral Law, it might have been, most likely it would have been immediately successful, but since then the idea had grown upon him, he had gloated over the thought of the crime so constantly that it had become part and parcel of his every day life, a settled thing, that was to be, he had worked out every move in the game that was to end so tragically, that now he was loath to let all this mental labour be cast aside and wasted, moreover, the strange fascination and pleasure which he trained himself to feel for the thing that was to be, had also trained him to look upon it as a divine sanction of the act, and lastly, his frequent interviews with the Ayah had reawakened in him all his worst and most

animal passions, and rendered all these inducements to commit the crime almost irresistible. And yet, even now, in spite of everything, he hesitated. He like every other human being had deep down in the depth of his consciousness a better self as well as a brutal and animal one, a love of beauty and of freedom and of healthy love and passion which had grown up and been developed during the æons of healthy open air life of myriads of ancestral forms. Again the suggestion was so simple and so novel; it had never so much as occurred to him and now, as it were, it almost took his reason by storm. And then, too, it would obviate a possibility which was indeed an exceedingly remote one, but was at least worth considering, that is to say, the possibility of the ultimate discovery of the murder which would certainly bring deep discredit upon the shrine if by any chance it should ever come about. The Pundit hesitated, nay, his mouth had almost shaped itself to say that he accepted the proposal, or at any rate would think the matter over, when all at once a pang of the most intense hatred for Ghotra Das shot through him, the sort of fury-spasm that seems like an actual material thing, that the mind can seize in its invisible grasp, fling at its opponent and do him a hurt with, at the same instant he looked in the direction of the window and saw or thought he saw a dusky form, the flash of a tawny robe and the white flicker of two almond eyes just glittering in the fast gathering darkness. All at once, as if by a miracle, the better nature died out of him, and the vulture maw, that craved for blood and revelled in destruction, leapt up again within him. No, no, a thousand times no, what was to be, must be, it was part of that eternal game of chess, self-played deep down in the deepest depths of nature, of which we were but the shadows of a shadow, a mere whiff and wind, that eddied round as the pieces moved on their invisible chess-board. The cruel expression settled down with a cast of even deeper ferocity than before about the corners of the Pundit's mouth and eyes, and his pitiless resolve dis-

covered itself in words of studied politeness. "My dearest lady", he said, "I feel so apprehensive on account of the delicate state of your health, the sun has already set, only one orange tawny flake of cloud still glows with a borrowed radiance which even now is dying out into a film of ashen grey, soon it will be as though it never had been, the pulse of living light will have fled away, who knows whither, perhaps into other worlds to suffuse and vivify other existences, the night-air is detrimental to persons in your state of health, let me order your attendants to bring round the palanquin." At these words the poor lady's heart died within her, the sleek inaccessability of the Pundit was like the coils of the constrictor which strangle you by means of their very softness and suppleness, at the same time whether that her nerves already weakened by ill health were still further unstrung by the harrowing nature of her interview, or that the secret presence of the Ayah in the Veranda cast a malignant spell upon her, some of the exasperation which her powerlessness evoked within her, suddenly got beyond her control, and she committed the indiscretion to move the Pundit's heart of flint by threats. "Stay, Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh", she exclaimed, "before you so unconditionally reject my last proposal, bethink you, your own life is not so flawless, nor am I so ignorant as not to know certain facts about it which had perhaps far better for your own saintship's sake be concealed, nor am I so uninfluential as not to be able to prevent the neighbourhood from deifying a hypocrite and a villain." These words were her death warrant. She had scarcely uttered them when she repented of them. For an instant the Pundit's fat face flushed livid with rage, and then assumed an expression of the most seraphic benevolence and compassion as he said with more than his usual urbanity:—"My dear lady, you cannot think how it grieves me to hear you speak in this way. I am certain, this interview has been too much for you. Let me order your palanquin (he touched a bell), nay, I insist upon it, allow me."

He proffered her her shawl. "And now let me say again, in spite of the grief I feel at your evident state of ill health, what pleasure it has given me" '—order the Ranee's palanquin at once—', he said this to the servant who at this moment appeared at the door, "and my urgent hope that it may be renewed at no distant period. Neighbours should at all events be neighbourly. Ah, my dear Ranee, if there were only more affection in the world and less bitterness, if kindness were the sole law of our earthly existence, if instead of playing upon the feelings of others and torturing them through their affections, we resolved, whenever it was possible, to respond in some measure to the love or passion others feel for us, instead of, as is too often the case, slighting it or affecting to be insulted by it, and if, when we found we could not return the love, instead of mocking and jeering at it, we still treated the victim of it with forbearance and kindness, so that everyone might have the greatest possible amount of freedom in his love, how much, how very much happier, how much liker heaven this earth of ours would become." Ranee Ghotra Das, who knew her countrymen well, was so much scared by these benevolent platitudes poured out with such fluent volubility by his Saintliness that the welling tears of grief and vexation dried up in her eyes before they fell, a trembling seized upon her and the room seemed to swim before her and to spin round and round. How much further the Pundit would have continued the exposition of his Universal Philanthropy and schemes for regenerating the world, I cannot say, for at this moment the servant announced that the Ranee's palanquin was at the door, and the poor lady hurried off, only too glad to cut short any more fruitless parleying. But the Pundit was at the door as she went out, stooped down and kissed her hand with the most chivalrous politeness, and said with a smile that was perfectly angelic in its sweetness and benevolence:—"Good night, my dear lady. A thousand thanks for this

delightful visit. May your sleep be sound and healthful. For sleep is the best of all restoratives."

As soon as the palanquin was out of sight, the Ayah Churi Puri emerged from the shadow of a neighbouring gable, and the Pundit joined her. What passed between them I could catch only very imperfectly, for the Pundit and Kama were so occupied with their own selfish passions and schemes that they had neglected me, the sacred fire of the hearth, and Gudla had gone off on an expedition by himself, to catch tree-frogs to put into the garden. Hence my flame of life burnt so low that it was only with difficulty I could poise myself on tip-toe, as it were, upon the scanty fuel and make out a little of what was going on between Chundra Singh and his sister in villainy. I heard however something like kissing, and then the words "cobra?, oh, that can be easily arranged", "I have all my agents and implements to hand"; "And it will facilitate the other more important one to morrow evening"; "It will really be a mercy to herself"; "And you will be here without fail a little before eight". Here the kissing recommenced and there was something horrible to me in the way this old scoundrel and the female Thug, his accomplice and beloved, if such a word can be applied to such a creature, managed to blend their schemes of murder and bloodshed, with careless words, of endearment, high flown expressions of pity and tenderness and over all to cast the ægis of their religion of Love and Mercy, which somehow was made to palliate and to condone, nay, to justify and even to command every sort of iniquity and cruelty. Presently the voices grew fainter, then ceased altogether and the Pundit reeled into the house in a sort of spiritual intoxication, shuffled into his study and sat there staring in a sort of glassy trance of throbbing suspense and expectation. It was to be then. The thing he had turned over and over in his mind and had so dwelt upon that it had become part of his existence. How delicious, and yet how agonising. It was to be, yes, to-morrow night. There would be a hurried whispering

with the Ayah. The touch of her strong supple hand in his that always sent a thrill through him down to the very marrow to give him courage, (and how delicious that thrill would be at such a crisis), then there would be a child's stifled sob and perhaps a cry stifled by his own podgy hand, (there was a sort of gross pleasure in picturing himself to himself as a sort of half burlesque figure in the tragedy, acting through it all more or less by way of a joke), and then everything would be over. Here thought collapsed. The Pundit sat entranced and stared away the night until the morning came. So let us leave him.

Meanwhile the Ayah had pursued her way like a swift knife, among the white cadaverous fields of maize and rice, lying white and ghostly in the moonlight, which was also reflected from her own lozenge-shaped eyes. Not to be observed by any chance passer-by (though that was a remote contingency) she had taken off her orange robe and held it rolled up in her arms, so that her dark swarthy skin blended with the gloom and scarcely added one shadow more to that night of shadows. As she approached the bungalow of Pindawar she uttered three low notes of different pitch which were doubtless a signal to her accomplices, and having robed herself, hurried to the back of the bungalow and then betook herself to the verandah to await the return of her mistress in the palanquin which, going round by the road and being heavy to carry, had naturally taken more time to return than her own active and supple self. Presently the tramp of the bearers were heard on the gravel walk, torches were lighted in the hall, and several native servants prepared to assist the Ranee out of the palanquin. The poor lady was so overcome by the scene with the Pundit and the fruitless efforts she had made in behalf of her adopted daughter, that she was hardly conscious of anything about her, but a smile of pleasure lighted up her sick face as she saw her faithful Ayah waiting to receive her and felt Churi Puri's strong muscular arm round her and sup-

porting her own feeble and tottering footsteps. Lasa was not to be awakened on any account; it was late, so the rest of the servants was sent to bed and the Ayah herself attended her mistress to her room, prepared her cordial, undressed her, put her to bed and did everything with that warmth of sisterly affection, tempered however by a peculiar deference and respect, which always made of her the most delightful of attendants. As though she wished to have it understood by her actions: 'In spite of all differences of race and caste, we are yet as parts of a great human family, sisters you and I, that you are rich and powerful, and that I am poor and dependent, makes no difference in our essential sisterhood, and therefore no envy or jealous feeling on account of your superiority rankles in my heart, on the contrary, I rejoice in performing my duties in that station in which nature and destiny have placed me.' And the poor invalid lady had interpreted and understood these worthy sentiments in her faithful Ayah and had remembered her liberally in her will, a fact, that by the way Churi Puri was perfectly well aware of. The poor lady, tired out as she was, soon fell into a profound sleep as soon as her cordial had been administered. The Ayah then opened the window and let fall three small stones onto the gravel walk below, there was a brief whispering at the casement, and I thought I heard something hiss in the darkness, then the window was shut, and the Ayah with noiseless footsteps passed through the chamber and carefully closed the door behind her, so as not to awaken her sleeping mistress. There is something very beautiful in these delicate attentions when shewn by menials and domestics and I gladly, therefore, seize this opportunity of chronicling one instance of many of the numerous good deeds of the faithful Ayah. Churi Puri had now retired to her room, knelt down and prayed as was her invariable practice morning and evening, then laid herself to rest and was soon fast asleep, so that all the house was now lapped in profound repose.

Lasa, worn out by sorrow, slept late. Ranees Ghotra Das had given orders not to be disturbed. Only the Ayah was up betimes. It was not until about ten o'clock that Lasa woke with a feeling that everything in her little world had now assumed a dunken grey colour, that henceforth there was to be no more sunshine, but for the rest of her life she was to live in a damp stone underworld in company with a hunchbacked dwarf who fixed her for ever with a pair of opaque steely blue eyes. But when she was quite awake and realised to the full that of which this wakening vision was only a symbol of the half conscious imagination, she felt that she was yet more miserable now than when she was only half awake. She rose and dressed herself mechanically, eat a little breakfast and then lounged listlessly about the drawing-room. Eleven o'clock struck, then twelve; the morning was cloudy and sultry, as though another storm was brewing. At last she thought she would go up to the Ranees bedroom and sit there until the invalid awoke. She knocked at the door very gently. Then pushed it open and entered, as there was no response. But Ranees Ghotra Das would never wake again in this world. Her adopted daughter went up to the bedside and started back with a cry of terror and dismay, and then stood for a moment as though she were herself turned to ice. Ranees Das lay there stone dead, from the side of her neck had trickled a thin stream of blood which was already dry and coagulated. She had been bitten in her sleep by a cobra. At Lasas cry the Ayah Churi Puri and several of the other servants hurried to the dead Ranees bedroom and all at once everything was in confusion. It was perhaps well for Lasa that she was compelled to bestir herself. It was necessary to summon officials to write to inform the dead lady's relatives of her melancholy fate, to send for ice and spices to preserve the body as far as possible from corruption, and having regard to the extreme heat and the particular manner of the lady's death to hurry on the preparation for cremation with as

little delay as possible. The pyre had to be constructed, various resinous gums and aromatic oils to be prepared, the medical official to be communicated with, that he might make out the requisite certificate of death and so many other arrangements to be made that it was not until four o'clock that a messenger was despatched to Chandra Dhoondhoo Singh to be present at the funeral obsequies on the following day. Lasa knew very well what would become of her. She would be sent according to the instructions of the late Ghotra Das's will, the contents of which the poor lady had frequently recited to her, under the charge of the Ayah Churi Puri to some relatives of the deceased, rich bankers of Allahabad, who had promised to treat her as her own child if anything should happen to Ghotra Das. No doubt, she would find there all the kindness of home life; but what a sudden break it was in her existence; what a rending and sundering from everything that formed her life heretofore. Although, indeed, now that Kama had deserted her, and all the beauty of her life had fled with him, it was almost a relief to think, that she would no longer be tortured by associations that reminded her every moment of the day-dream that had ended so suddenly and so tragically. And here her tears fell fast, and this was a relief to her, for the kind lady, who had been mother, sister, everything to her from the days of her early orphanhood, who had never spoken a harsh word to her, who had treated her with even greater tenderness than if she had been her own daughter, and who had now (but of this Lasa had no suspicion) sacrificed her own life in a fruitless attempt to save her adopted daughter from unhappiness and perhaps worse, was no more. In her distress and misery Lasa naturally turned to the kind good Ayah who had always been like a second or perhaps I should say a third mother to her, nursed her when she was ill, rejoiced in her happiness and sympathised with her in the few troubles she had ever yet experienced. And the Ayah was, oh, so kind, so comforting. She laid the poor wounded head

on her bosom, stroked the poor pale cheeks, and her own tears fell fast upon it and mingled with Lasa's. How gently she fondled her fair charge, patted the thin delicate little hands and pressed the heavy eyelids, now red with weeping, until a drowsy numbness stole all over Lasa, and all her sorrows and anguish seemed to recede away in the far distance, as though they belonged to another world. But the Ayah still continued to stroke and press her eyelids, and as she did so whispered in her ear words and broken sentences which were no doubt intended still further to comfort her and to alleviate her distress. At last, when Lasa was fairly hypnotised or bewitched, to use the old expression, the Ayah laid her down upon a couch and stood over her with a mocking smile upon her own face and that peculiar blink or flicker of the whites of her lozenge-shaped eyes which gave her such a sinister expression. Doubtless the words she had muttered in the poor girls ears were spells and incantations—or to use the phrase employed by the scientists who, having for long enough decided sorcery and witchcraft as the figments of disordered brains and as possessed of no objective reality, and having at last been incontinently obliged to swallow the whole of them, have according to their wont endeavoured to hide their own discomfiture, and to cover their retreat under a cloud of pedantic hendecasyllables—, suggestions instilled into the torpid brain in order that they might set in motion certain trains of thought and modes of action as soon as the victim was restored to her state of normal consciousness. "Poor moth", said the Ayah to herself with a voice of half contemptuous pity, as she gazed at the sleeping Lasa. "Even now thou art far away beyond the paradise of dreamless spirits, but thou shalt sleep a still deeper sleep before another morrow dawns." So saying, she turned away from the unconscious girl, lapped in a trance pregnant with fateful consequences, and looked out of the window, for the sound of a strange step on the gravel outside had caught her quick and watchful ear. It was

a messenger who brought a letter and a small parcel for her young mistress. The Ayah took them and opened the letter without further ceremony. It was from the Nautch-girl and ran as follows:—"Harken! pale half-breed of the Feringhees, when this letter comes into thy hands, thy lover will be in my arms. Take his ring, it is a pledge of his faithlessness and contempt. I send it. I, the reckless child of Liberty and Desire, thy rival daughter of the sultry south and its fiery populace. Now reap the reward of thy milky purity and thy highborn virtues. Now weep and moan for thy desolateness, and repent thee that thou hadst ever seen the faithless light of day. Where is thy mirth and child-love now? 'tis the gossamer that strews our passion's couch. Hang thyself in thy locks of tow, thou vixen of the Feringhees, drown thyself in the eyewater of thy fishy lenses, thou hempen halm, thou fibre of balled flax. For thy lover has deserted thee; thou art of no more account than the dropping of birds in his eyes. Thou art become as the slime of the stagnant pool and the serous whey of sour milk." "Bravo", exclaimed the Ayah to herself as she read the letter, "my swarthy daughter of the dance of death, my black water-snake of the mango swamp. There spoke the passionate heart of the black-haired children of the south and the star-flaming night of southern skies. But forgive me, if I intercept thy fiery scroll and use the ring for a more fatal lure than the rapture of thy hatred had wit to divine." So saying, she placed the ring and the missal in her own bosom and again turned to the unhappy Lasa, who lay white and rigid in the comatose condition of the hypnotic trance: Having made a few passes over her, the Ayah quickly brought her into the condition of dreaming spirits, to use the expression of the Vedantic philosophy for one of the four states of being which so strangely correspond with the four conditions of consciousness now recognised by modern hypnotists, a correspondency which suggests the idea, that the ancient Hindoo philosophers had long ago scientifically investi-

gated facts that our modern sages are only just getting an inkling of. Lasa now awoke to external perceptions and the Ayah addressed her as follows:—"My poor child, your old Ayah has not been so indifferent to her dear young mistress' distress and grief as she may have appeared to be. It has grieved her also to see the fair young flower she has tended and cherished so carefully from its first infancy, now droop and wither in the chilling air of neglect. She herself knows what it is to lose all that made life a joyous and delightful thing—like a song that springs from the jubilant bosom of nature. She herself knows what it is to feel the loss of a first affection to pine in the cold obscurity of forgetfulness, to be the scorn and pity of a successful and hated rival. Listen, it is but too true, that your beloved has been tempted and bewitched by a godless siren, who now glories in her triumph over you, her rival. This night he has promised to meet her; but I have seen him; I have pleaded with him in your behalf and I have so far influenced his better feelings, that, before finally abandoning you, he wishes to see if his earlier love for you might yet revive and chase out the new and lower one. He has consented to meet you under the colonnades by the sacred tank at the spot where your fair image first caught his fancy. See, he has sent this ring as a pledge that he has not quite forgotten you. Take it with you. Be at the spot indicated a little before nine to night, and all may yet be well. And when the sunny past has come again, remember that it was the old Ayah who charmed it back, she who has loved and loves you still, as dearly as she would love her own daughter if she had one." During this speech Lasa's face had gradually cleared, and now a scraphic smile beamed from her eyes such as irradiates the breaking eye of the dying saint at the vision of the delusive paradise which he dreams will soon be his for evermore. She was about to utter passionate exclamations of gratitude to the good Ayah, but the latter, by a few mesmeric passes, checked the eager current of the girl's

reawakened consciousness, not desiring to be the object of endearments to which she may perhaps have felt she had very little claim, and which for the rest annoyed her. She left Lasa however in a happy tranquil frame of mind with the ill omened ring on her finger, and her mind and nervous system charged or wound up (whichever metaphor you may prefer) to carry out the suggestions of her hypnotiser. The two threads of the narrative have now been brought down to the same point in time, the series of incidents, I mean, that happened at Pindawar and those that took place at Benares in the shrine of Vishnu and the Pundit's house. Henceforth the two currents of events will more and more blend together as we drew towards their conclusion. And here I wish to point out a close correspondency between the growing faithlessness of Kama to Lasa on the previous day and the growing distress of Lasa, as the conviction of that faithlessness forced itself upon her mind. During the morning of Kama's visit to Benares he remained faithful to Lasa, visited the goldsmith and purchased the promised ring, and Lasa all that morning was in the happiest frame of mind. In the afternoon he attended the marriage festivities and the Nautch, which ended by so completely estranging his heart from Lasa, and step by step, as the intoxication of his new passion absorbed him into itself, step by step Lasa's anxiety grew to apprehension, her apprehension to terror, her terror to despair. And with every further step that brought him nearer to that delusive mirage of some unconceivable delight, that played like an electric atmosphere of auroral fire about the seductive image of his enchantress, the shadows of fate and gloom closed darker and darker round the ill-fated Lasa and her home, as if their minds were linked together by some ethereal element in such a way, that every fresh thrill of faithless passion in the one transformed itself in the other to the stab of an invisible dagger that thirsted for that other's very life and blood. And yet, in this case at all events, we have

no need to suppose that there was any direct mesmeric influence between the two minds. If, as the passions of the one grew, the hopes of the other declined in an inverse order, that was simply part and parcel of the evolution of events, and implied nothing of a mysterious nature in the case nor any invisible material chord of sympathy by which successive readjustments were, so to say, electrically regulated and controlled.

The two series of events and their correspondencies were in reality the outcome of a cause above them and outside of them, that is to say, the Pundit and his selfish scheming from which they both took their origin and which moulded them stage by stage into a deceptive appearance of being mutually co-ordinated. And it is one of the very commonest fallacies of the human intellect and often the least suspected to imagine a relation of cause and effect between phenomena which run, so to say, in parallel lines mimicking one another's every fold and curve, when in reality the correspondencies are wholly due to some ulterior cause which forms the origin and starting point of the whole series of phenomena.

I have now very little more to relate about what happened on that eventful day. About six o'clock in the evening a messenger arrived at the house of Chandra Singh announcing the death of the Ranee Ghotra Das and inviting his presence at Pindawar on the following day to take part in the funeral obsequies of the unfortunate lady. He sent a vague message of condolence and an equally vague promise to assist in the last offices to the dead without, however, I believe, having much intention of fulfilling them. He then summoned Kama; but not until he had refreshed himself with a cup of coffee and enjoyed a half hour's quiet contemplation. Kama approached the Pundit, but he was in too much agitation at the near approach of the hour when he was to meet the Nautch-girl, to recollect the usual stereotyped phrases in which he was in the habit of expressing his filial reverence for his father. He stood before that

worthy blushing, tongue-tied and abashed. "My dear boy", began the Pundit in a solemn manner, "I have summoned you to communicate to you a serious and important piece of news. With deep regret I have to announce to you the sudden death of our distinguished neighbour the Rancee Ghotra Das. She was bitten in her sleep by a cobra", he added significantly. The Pundit, after making this speech, felt a curious inclination to laugh, and something like a smile did flicker an instant about his mouth and eyes, but he sternly repressed these indications of levity as out of place under the circumstances. Kama's thoughts recurred at once to the mysterious movement of the cobra's head and the flashing of its pick-axe-like fang that morning in the shrine; and this melancholy event explained it all. The Pundit had no doubt been early informed of what had happened, and by some mysterious power had given that indication of his knowledge of this event. The idea greatly relieved Kama's mind; there was now no need to imagine that his father harboured any sinister designs against Lasa or against any one else. His last scruples about giving the rein to his new passion for the lovely daughter of Liberty and Desire were thus completely set at rest. He could not even conceal his anxiety to go at once to the shrine. The Pundit perceived his restlessness, and rightly conjecturing the cause of it felt an irresistible desire to tease his son a little, although at the same time he was desirous that he should be out of the way, when the Ayah Churi Puri came to make the last final arrangements for putting the unfortunate Lasa out of her misery, as the Pundit expressed it to himself euphemistically. He remarked therefore:—"How beautiful is this fresh clear evening after the sultry afternoon, let us make the most of it, my son, and take a turn by the tank and through its cool colonnades. See, how the sunset colours glimmer among the lotus-leaves, and how the white light of the rising moon silvers the heaven behind the vast flower-cups of the temple's domes." Kama was particularly anxious

not to have his father's company just then; Chandra Singh might go mooning about the tank as he sometimes did until past midnight, he therefore remarked:—"When the hair is grey the night-dews gather there; when the bones are hollow with age, the chills and damps of evening fill them with cramps and agues, let my father cherish the precious life that is as dear to his sons as their own life is and not venture out into the cold night-air." "The warmth of emotion of one of these sons will be a secure protection against any risks to be incurred", rejoined Chandra Singh, laughing somewhat cynically, as he took his son's arm, pressed it closely against his side and stepped with him out of the veranda to the south portion of the tank and colonnades.

For some time he paced up and down, amused by the chafing impatience of the victimised Kama and made various sentimental if somewhat trite observations about the beauty of the sunset and moonrise, until at last his quick ear caught the sound of the Ayah's footsteps in the distance somewhere behind the ruined wall which surrounded the precincts of the temple. So detaching himself rather brusquely from his son's arm he remarked in a tone of portly benevolence:—"But my son is anxious to be off. Something draws him away. What it may be, who can tell? Something stronger even than the bonds of filial love. Things happen. Go, and my blessings be upon you. Be prosperous, be happy. Know all. Nothing is common or unclean. Revel in the intoxicating elixir of youth and health. May the bow of Kama never know defeat." So saying, the Pundit rolled off in the direction of the northern colonnades and Kama, winged by his father's inspiring remarks with an extra pinion of passion and desire, soon vanished in the direction of the shrine. As soon as he was out of sight, the Pundit drew from the shadow of the colonnades a tall bamboo, from the top depended a bright tin spangle, in shape and size similar to those worn by knights of the bath or garter. This bamboo he planted with much precision upright in a

clink between two flags of the marble pavement just at the spot where he usually inveigled the tench out of their summer day dream in the tank. The spangle hung in the air and reflected the light of the rising moon. Chandra Singh then gave a low whistle and the Ayah Churi Puri was immediately at his side. And now a grievous thing happened. They began whispering and confabulating together. I knew it was about the poor, poor Lasa and I thought, if I could only hear what they said to one another, I, being a semi-divine personage, might somehow or other put the poor child upon her guard against their horrid plots. But everything was adverse to her. The Pundit and his sons had been even more neglectful of their duty to me this afternoon than they had been the previous day, and no doubt the exciting events of the two days together had also told upon my health. At any rate, when I raised myself as high as I could on tip-toe, as it were, on the top of the scanty fragment of cow-dung they had flung me for my supper in order that I might listen to their conversation, I overreached myself: I felt a sudden spasm and unheard of catastrophe in any well-regulated Brahmin's household, I, the sacred fire of the hearth—went out—and in so doing, I awoke.—

CHAPTER XIV

THE LAST OF THE PLANET OF THE SEVEN-FOLD UNITY

This time I awoke in earnest, in fact, my awakening was so complete that I forgot everything about the events recorded in the previous chapters. I awoke and found myself lying on the immense platform of the Karauthmic observatory and surrounded by the whole family of Karauthmach, seven in number, whose corporate matrimonial existence divided itself between the task of studying our solar system and producing a young family to succeed them in their scientific studies, when the time

came for them to obey the fiat of the Perriddez and to yaluth. I awoke then to my new sphere of existence in total oblivion of the romantic history which has been traced, with what success I know not, in the previous pages of this veracious narrative. But although I preserved no definite recollection of all that I had just experienced, it had left its mark upon my mind in a sense of opposition to the Karauthmic universe and of a confirmed belief in the dispensation under which we are born on earth, as that which is morally and spiritually the focus and centre of everything else, and this caused me to assume a more defiant attitude, than I had hitherto ventured upon, towards the three-legged bird-angels of the planet of the sevenfold unity. In often happens even in the intercourse of human beings with one another in the terrestrial sphere that a person of confirmed free-thinking opinions is driven into an attitude of hostility to his own most cherished ideas, if he is confronted by another who holds some views with more dogmatic certainty than he himself, because the negativism and scepticism, which forms, as it were, the ground-work of all genuine agnosticism, are thereby enlisted on the side of the orthodox views which are so unadroitly combated by a scepticism that, in becoming dogmatic, has at the same time become a contradiction of itself. And thus, when I awoke and found myself surrounded by the seven huge winged giants who constituted a Karauthmic matrimonial unity, and then remembered the dualism of our own earth-existence, and all its diversified joys and sorrows, something like disgust of the passionless magnificence of these stomachless, catsup-swilling mysterious existences began to take the place of my previous admiration for them. I began to imagine that in the ordering of an all-wise Providence I had perhaps been despatched thither to preach a Gospel of Salvation through belief in the blood of the Saviour of all worlds, the tiny little human being crucified on Calvary, to these benighted non-descripts, and my breast heaved proudly at the thought that I, an unworthy sciep-

tic, should have been singled out by the unerring wisdom of an all-seeing Providence for so important a mission to worlds so far away, to creatures in all respects so far removed, from that central speck in the boundless whole, that celestial Mecca of infallible truth and of Moral Revelation—our own earth-pellet, from whose inspired center the priceless heir-loom of its heavenly revealed truths were destined to spread and spread on and on for ever like the light of some central Universal Sun, until every sphere of organic existence should be moulded and conformed to the faultless pattern of Christendom and the Christian State, with their teeming millions of happy human beings raising a perpetual hymn of praise to their Creator from the fragrant slums of their great cities, from the glorious solitudes of their abstemious rural life, from the harmonious rafters of their parochial vestries and of their political meeting-houses, so that at last the whole Universe should become, what all will admit that Christendom now is, a visible and audible Hymn of Praise, in act and thought and life and bodily form and substance to the great Creator and his Blessed Son to whom are due all that Perfectness and Beauty of Holiness which are everywhere so apparent in all Christian-fashioned States and Communities. In the arrogant contempt these reflections aroused within me I felt a sort of satisfaction in the idea of affronting the sensibilities of these misguided people of the Sevenfold planet, and of forcing down their throats as the highest of all forms of existence that dualistic mode of being which had proved itself to be the highest, because it had produced myself. Strange perversion of ideas I cannot but call it now, as I look back on that sudden recrudescence of a religious terrestrial dogmatism, which no fanatical beef-tea-baptising Baptist Missionary in Hindustan ever exceeded in the most dogmatic flights of his large-minded Christian Charity. To me all these mysterious beings appeared too abject, too ignorant in anything appertaining to the depths of the mysteries of Grace and Redemption (whatever their scientific attain-

ment might be) to merit that I should waste my time in expounding to them the comfortable and reasonable conclusions of our profound theology, that science above all other sciences which indirectly through its two thousand years of vigorous life has, like leaven, so leavened the huge mass of human society, that this latter has become, as it were, a living image of the Divinity Himself, a type of all that is most perfect in the organic universe. No, I would give them a taste of our Blessed Christian humour, that rare outblossoming of our human dualism, that better than anything else would put them in a proper frame of mind to receive unadulterated the pure milk of the word. I reflected. There was a recitation that generally met with a vast success at charity-concerts and parochial penny-readings called Miss Spanker and old Mr. Perkin's wig which I was sure would fetch them. So, without making any apology for forcing this salutary dose of Attic salt upon my Karauthmic audience, I began, after first cocking my billy-cock hat a little on one side, burying my thumbs in the sleeve holes of my waist-coat and assuming a jaunty devil-may-care sort of swagger. On terra firma this generally at once put my audience in a good humor and set all the country yokels grinning from ear to ear. But on glancing round I observed, instead of the appreciation I had expected, a look of horror and disgust upon the faces of the seven members of my winged audience who had now formed a circle round me, and were grasping one anothers hands as if mutually supporting one another during the dismal ordeal to which I was about to subject them. Not heeding their foolish behaviour, I went on to explain with a number of broad grins, winks, "you knows" and comic "business" generally how Miss Spanker, the fast young lady of Popplewell, chivied poor old Mr. Perkins five times round the library of their town residence, and then whipped the wig off his poor bald pate and flung it across the street just into the boudoir window of the maiden lady her Aunt Miss Primwell, and how this lady's bosom friend

Miss Viper happened to come in and find it there, and all the misunderstandings and back-bitings and jealousies that followed thereupon, and how this and that happened. Most carefully I paused where a civilised Christian audience was wont to laugh, obstreperously most conscientiously I mounted exactly the right facial expression and wreathed my lips into the fat smile that always convulsed the audience in the sixpenny seats and made the black-guard boys exclaim: "That's it; at it again, Guvnor", but not a whisper of approbation greeted my expectant ears. I looked up in somewhat indignant astonishment, and then perceived to my horror and disgust, that the whole of my audience stood in a circle round me hand in hand in a state of the most profound coma, and worst of all, that, while they were in this condition, a strong galvanic current passed through the circle which they formed and completely prevented me from creeping out between their twenty-one legs which surrounded me like a druidical circle of upright stones. This beginning of my missionary efforts was certainly not propitious, I had incurred the serious risk of being starved to death in the impenetrable circle of a living mouse-trap. What a humiliating and useless form of martyrdom. They might perhaps not wake for days, perhaps not for weeks, perhaps not before I had died a death of lingering starvation. At last, after I had tried in vain at every point in it to break through the mystic circle which held me prisoner, an old spell or incantation suddenly came into my head, and I repeated it aloud. It ran as follows:—"As there is light and dark in the heart of the Lord. I know a castle of Lead, from the castle of Lead I know a road to the Castle of Silver and a river that leads to the fortress of Gold, where stands the bloodthirsty God of war and his brother the Lord of sacrifice above them is the God of the sky who seeth and heareth all, below them is the Goddess of Love who accomplishes all. Open Sesame!" To my great delight, as I repeated these words one after the other, the Karauthmach awoke, and one by

one, after fixing me with a look of the bitterest hatred, turned on their heels and disappeared one after the other as they muttered the words:—"I went to sleep and dreamt a dream, most horrible." Never again, I said to myself, will I attempt to inoculate these stupid creatures with the pure lymph of Christian humour. I must try more stringent methods. One by one they had all disappeared, except my own particular Karauthmon who now turned to me and addressed me as follows:—"What, my little titmouse, is the cause of this extraordinary behaviour. Have the vapours of the fungal-forest, we have so lately visited, affected your poor little simian brain, that you play these extraordinary antics on your first introduction to our sublime family-life. Your brain, methinks, requires oxidation. Stay. I will see if I can provide a remedy for these megrims. So saying, he took me up, laid me in the palm of his left hand, so that my feet and legs projected a little from the side of it, and administered to them from below so sharp a fillip with the middle finger of his right hand, that all at once I found myself spinning through the air and throwing innumerable somersaults like the shuttle-shaped piece of wood employed in the classic game of tip-cat. Surely, I said to myself, by this time I must have earned the crown of martyrdom, and I clapped my hands to my head, to see if it was there, but I felt nothing but a mop of tangled tresses; doubtless the crown of martyrdom had obeyed the law of centrifugal force during the series of circumvolutions I had described with such unwilling velocity, and was now itself spinning through space on a visit to Orion or the milky way. As I sat gasping in the palm of my tormentor's hand, he approached me to his eye, and after scrutinising me a while carefully with their microscopic lenses, observed contemptuously:—"What a wretched piece of brain-work, so awkwardly constructed, that it can hardly reflect even the most distorted image of nature, much less live in any sort of union with its inorganic life. And this miserable little imp imagines that he and his simian kith

and kin are the moral centres of the universe, and that he has been despatched hither to preach his grovelling doctrine of salvation to us and ours. Let me assure you, my poor little titmouse", he continued, "destiny has despatched you hither on a far grander mission than what your poor confused little nerve ganglion has imagined to itself. What that mission is, you shall be informed of shortly. In the meantime see if you can stand upright." So saying, he put me on the ground, but I was still so giddy with my enforced display of aerial natation, that I at once fell flat on my face, and the Karauthmon, with a smile of half contemptuous pity, had to pick me up and set me on my feet again. "To think, that a miserable little quadruped, that by a sinister series of circumstances has developed a propensity to waddle about on its hind legs, should imagine itself commissioned by the most High to go on missionary excursions through the heights and depths of heaven, a puny contemptible little wretch, that even on its own planet can with difficulty keep its feet to attempt to play the prophet and priest among beings of a higher order in the scale of existence than its short-lived, short-coming, short-winded little self. I suppose I ought to be angry, but it is really all too ridiculous. But tell me, my little mannikin", said the Karauthmon more kindly and patting me on the back with his middle-finger, for even from the most abject, most ignorant of creation's products it is possible to learn something, tell me, if you can, something about your terrestrial science and philosophy, at the worst its absurdities might amuse me." At the Karauthmon's request, which I felt was kindly intended and meant to flatter my terrestrial vanity, I endeavoured to give a sketch of our dualistic series of philosophical systems—the spiritual and the materialistic, the agnostic, the empirical and the transcendental one, until the growing somnolence of my companion warned me to desist. He opened his eyes as I did so and enquired in a drowsy tone of voice:—"And can you, with all your philosophical systematising, tell

me at this instant whether you are asleep or awake, dreaming or in your right senses?" "Most assuredly I am perfectly awake", I replied. "And were you not equally so when you were a witness to the events which happened at the shrine and temple of Poojerabad?"

All at once, like a flash of lightning, my vision of the shrine of Vishnu and of all that happened there stood out with a reality which threw my actual living existence entirely into the shade. "I cannot say", I replied embarrassed. "The dream was but a dream", said the Karauthmon, "and yet, it was a reproduction in dream-space of events which actually occurred in Hindustan some fifteen years ago, and of which in my scientific investigations into the life of your planet I myself accidentally became cognisant." "Then do tell me what happened to the poor Lasa and how it all ended", I exclaimed with anxious impatience, "was she——?" But the Karauthmon continued, without heeding my interruption:—"The intensity of my individuality has no doubt imprinted it upon the congested awkwardly constructed system of ganglia you call a brain, and thus it has a reality to your mind which your waking actual life among the unwonted surroundings of our planet and our stellar space can lay no claim to at present in your consciousness—if indeed", he added with a sigh, "it will ever be possible to distribute you here in any satisfactory system of existence among ourselves." The peculiar wording in the Karauthmon's last remark filled me with a certain uneasiness and apprehension which I could not conceal. The Karauthmon perceived my emotion, and to quiet it observed:—"Do not be under the least apprehension. It is only our way of putting it. Pray, consider how differently we look upon organic existence and everything connected with it in our more favoured universe." This remark quieted me a little, although I still had an uneasy feeling in my mind, that something of a critical kind was impending which I would gladly have avoided if I could. But alas! I was powerless, utterly powerless, in that strange planet,

isolated from my terrestrial kith and kin by millions and millions of leagues of empty space. The Karauthmon continued the conversation as follows:—"You have given me a sketch of what you consider to be your most recondite metaphysical systems, I may be perhaps able to indicate vaguely some of the ideas which have been ventilated from time to time in Karauthmic philosophical circles, though, for my part, I lay no great weight upon these attempts to solve the unsoluble. No doubt it will interest you to hear them too." I assented, and the Karauthmon continued as follows:—"In very early times, after the primitive evolution of Karauthmic existence, our planet was considered by the philosophers to be everything. At that time, owing to the density of the cloud canopy, any other conclusion would have been impossible. At last, however, as our powers of flight increased, some daring navigators of the aerial ocean managed to soar above the thick blanket of clouds which swathed the planet and brought down to us wonderful stories of the starry firmament above the thick curtain of vapours which kept the rest of us in darkness. These revelations were for a long time regarded with mistrust, as the inventions of unscrupulous travellers are wont to be with you, until the gradual clearing of the atmosphere corroborated what the aeronauts had told us, and the stars and moons shone out gradually with greater and greater clearness through the vaporous medium of cloud and mist. The phenomenon of night and day and the strange diffused globe of light which daily travelled from east to west through the over-charged atmosphere had long been a puzzle to our philosophers; now that the explanation had been arrived at it caused a complete revolution in all our ideas. Although or perhaps because far more highly organised than your terrestrial species of human beings we had never claimed that exclusive position in the universe which you seem to assume to be yours by right of some a priori Moral Law; we never considered ourselves to be anything more than functions of the prepotent life of external nature

which surrounded us and carried us along with it as the river embraces and carries with it the swirling eddies that are the accidental outcome of its never ceasing flow. And thus it came about that our philosophical speculations resolved themselves without much difficulty into a single system called Adanta Pholoi or Wave Imitation system, which is even now retained provisionally, though at present we consider it only a feeble Karauthmic adumbration of some supreme Verity that lies beyond. According to this system all existence is uniform and consists of an infinite series of waves infinitely great at one end of the scale, infinitely small at the other, the smaller ones being generated by the greater ones, as these recede before making another spring forward. Phenomenal existence we consider as merely an illusion of sight, manifesting itself to beings with different degrees of range of vision, as different points in the scale of diminishing wave vibrations are reached—but in reality it is purely phenomenal. Some hints of what our opinions are on this subject may be gleaned by watching the waves on a sandy beach the grains of which consist of coloured particles whose different colours correspond with the different sizes and weights of the grains of sand. Here it will be observed that the action of the wave sets in motion innumerable series of subsidiary wavelets, which as well as the great waves form an impression or rather sand-picture of themselves by sifting out these variously coloured grains of sand. As the wavelets are broken up into still smaller ripples we see traced or graven in the sand forms identical with the skin markings of the palms of the hand, markings which, be it observed, are also produced by the force of the wind, showing that in the air or more correctly speaking in the ether is the 'primum mobile' which produces organic forms in grosser matter. And if we observe the sand-pictures more closely, we shall further observe as the wavelets degrade and break up into still finer vibrations, that yet other markings and dappings of finer forms and textures are evolved, resem-

bling in every respect the feather-markings of birds and the scale-markings of fish and lizards. Not less apparent are the shell-forms, trilobite forms, and even forms mimicking the microscopical structures of plants to the careful observer of living inorganic nature, so that we are not altogether surprised to find, when we ransack the depths of stellar space, many nebulæ and star clusters, which at certain definite points in the series of magnifying powers of different telescopes stand out profiled against the sky in sharp outlines, closely imitating the forms of various low organisations of planetary life, such for instance as those of the foraminiferæ, the diatoms and the desmidiæ. As the magnifying power of the telescope with which we view these celestial objects is increased, however, and we analyse more distinctly their interior texture, this analogy of forms disappears just as when we turn the lens-system of our microscopic eyes upon yourself, my little midget, and increase the field of our vision, the distinctness with which we see all your internal structure at a glance throws into the shade the clearness of definition of the boundary line of your bodily form." Here he took me up in his hand and scrutinised me in a way that made me feel extremely uncomfortable. "We have then several analogies of a striking kind", he continued, placing me on my feet again, "first of all the series of forms of planetary life beginning with a faint nebosity and ending with the circumscribed precision of a solar system like ours and yours, alongside of this series again we have a parallel series, closely resembling it, the series of appearances of an object seen with glasses of different power, for example, a nebula with the naked eye appears like a faint speck of stellar protoplasm, but, as it is successively viewed through stronger glasses, becomes more and more definite in shape and outline until the increasing power of the glass we view it through resolves it at last by laying bare all its inner structure, and lastly we have the homogeneous specks of living matter which gradually develope into forms of the greatest definiteness as in pigs,

human beings, flowers and other products of highly differentiated, highly elaborated fauna and flora. The rhythmical character of evolution has been too much lost sight of by your Darwinians", continued the Karauthmon, "and it is a fact of great importance in the final solution of the problem of existence, for it points to a formal cause, as well as to material and efficient causes as one not to be overlooked in the fight they have necessarily had to wage against orthodox and religious ignorance, in order to establish most important natural causes that no theory I have yet heard of has been able satisfactorily to explain. I allude to the development of the flowers of certain species of hawk-weeds and especially of a south European one having a corymb of purple flowers." Here he again glanced at me with his immense piercing blue eyes in a way that made me feel extremely uncomfortable. "We have first", he continued, "the composite flower of the dandelion on a single foot-stalk, but this flower has been developed by concretion out of a corymb of some sort of campanula form of flower, the structure of whose flowers was pentagonal. Now take some common species of hawk-weed and observe that the yellow flowers are distributed over a branching corymb; but observe the florets which compose the heads of the small composite flowers, they are already beginning to be arranged symmetrically, now take the large yellow hawk-weed of southern Europe with its loose corymb of small flowers, here the florets are generally arranged in groups of five symmetrically disposed, so that the composite flowers more or less mimic a pentagonally formed single flower, and if we turn to the large purple south European species, we find that the imitation has there been carried so far that the compound flowers exactly imitate single flowers, being composed of just five purple florets, the reproductive portion of the plant being sunk deep down in the calyx of the compound flower, with this remarkable transformation let us not fail to observe the change from the purple of the primitive campanula form to the yellow of the composite dandelion

and back again in the flower-imitating south European hawk-weed to the primitive purple of the campanula. Let us now inductively in imagination carry this process a step further and we shall have a yellow compound-flower on a single flower stalk, whose flowers are themselves compound-flowers mimicking simples ones. And if we imagine another step in the see-saw of this infinite series we shall again have a corymb of purple compound-flowers mimicking simple flowers formed on the pentagonal pattern of which the five florets will be compound-flowers formed of compound-flowers; and this series can be carried on ad infinitum through single yellow compound dandelike flowers of greater and greater complexity alternating with corymbs of purple compound-flowers mimicking pentagonally formed simple flowers also of greater and greater complexity, until the mind grows dizzy in contemplating these rings of ever increasing multiplicity. In this instance the rythmical character of evolution, that is to say its partial dependence upon a formal cause is fully made out, and this is only one striking instance out of many that could be adduced. But enough of these speculations", continued the Karauthmon, glancing at me again in a way that made me feel extremely uncomfortable, "let us come down to more practical, more homely matters." "But first do tell me", I exclaimed, my mind still running on the romance of Kama's young life which I had become acquainted with in so wonderful a manner, "do tell me by what mysterious kind of magic, you, living these terrific distance from the earth we inhabit, informed yourself with such detail of the events that happened at Pindawar and the shrine of Vishnu; and oh! do tell me also what was the end of it all, and whether Kama and Lasa married and lived happily afterwards as in all well-constructed novels the hero and the heroine assuredly should do according to the judgment of the critics from whose infallible wisdom in such matters there is no appeal." "Patience, my little poppet, all in good time, you shall hear what became of Lasa and Kama, or

if you hear no more about them I promise you that you shall be quite indifferent to their fate. But your mention of that tedious literary abortion, the terrestrial romantic novel, reminds me that it is high time you should learn something of our Karauthmic domestic life and the manner in which we propagate ourselves, and you will then be able to realise how insufferably trite and commonplace the narrow round of events repeated ad nauseam in your works of fiction appear to beings more highly developed in the scale of being than yourselves, how, what you call your humour, that dreary outcome of your dualistic state of being, makes us sick with disgust and your inflated domestic tragedies and lackadaisical lovers fished up out of mill-ponds excite all the risible faculties of our soul." "At any rate, we manage to get on without three legs, you milking stool", I exclaimed, nettled at the slight respect paid to a form of literature which all well-regulated persons are aware faithfully reflects as in a looking-glass not only human nature and human life in all its diversity of action and passion, but also the life of universal nature of which human nature is, as it were, a small edition and brief epitome containing everything worth mentioning in good society. "No wonder, you are jealous", I added with a certain spitefulness, "a pretty figure you would cut truly, if, having spread out your silk pocket-handkerchief on the Brussel's carpet so as not to soil your best pair of Sunday trowsers, you should essay to kneel and profer your devotion to some exquisite nymph of London fashion adorable in white satin and pearl powder, while all the while your precious third claw was sticking out behind, like the rapier of a sixteenth century dandy or the barbed tail of Herr Diavolo." "My little pinch of snuff", exclaimed the Karauthmon, for a moment really angry at my impertinence as he considered it, "mind henceforth what you are saying, or, as you are a living jack-a-napes, I shall take" . . . so saying he took me up and held me to his nose, but soon put me down again with a wry face and a gesture of disgust from which I

gathered that his appreciation of humanity was not what it ought to have been. "However", continued the Karauthmon, relaxing a little, as he saw that I looked very contrite, "the extraordinary difficulty which a romanticist of your dualistic sphere finds in bringing together only a single pair of lovers at the end of his three volumes of inflated twaddle, will perhaps give you some notion how difficult it is in the Planet of the sevenfold unity to bring about a composite matrimonial union such as forms the basis of our society. Our domestic life consists of seven, and unless all seven can be brought together the marriage cannot be fulfilled. For unlike marriages on your dualistic earth, where mothers arrange a union for their young daughters with old men for the sake of a fortune: and where young men sell themselves to old women for a similar reason, owing to the closer union of our lives than yours with nature and nature's life our marriages are purely natural processes and can only come about if each person of the group of seven that constitutes a composite of matrimonial union is in love with every other member of it, if you can imagine a terrestrial novelist in the course of his romance compelled to pair off forty two pairs of happy lovers, you will form a small and but very imperfect idea of the difficulties which actually confront Karauthmic Society in their domestic affairs and in the continuation of the species. Indeed, were it not for our length of life and the perfect equality of everyone in the Planet of the sevenfold unity and freedom to marry and fall in love with everyone else, it is most likely the race would die out. As it is, our population remains almost stationary. But this, as I have pointed out on a previous occasion, is an advantage rather than a disadvantage in a society which aims at perfecting the individual, rather than, as in man-ape society, at sacrificing the individual for the sake of producing an enormous quantity of degraded animalisms. A great part of our life then consists in bringing about these family-unions, which, when they are formed, satisfy every possible desire of a living

mortal being, but if only five or six of the seven members of the union should be brought together, and the other two be undiscoverable, the five or six can yet live together as a brotherhood only they will not be able to transmit any offspring to posterity. All the completed matrimonial unions are carefully recorded in the proceedings of the Perriddez and form a most interesting study at once scientific and romantic; for the process of establishing a matrimonial union in many respects resembles an extremely complicated game of chess, with the addition of all those varied passions of love in their endless individual varieties which form the substratum of all highly organised planetary existence." At this point in his discourse the Karauthmon entered into a large number of anatomical details, which out of deference to the great goddess of the Athenians—Mrs. Grundy—I suppress, although I have no doubt to the scientific and philosophical world they would have been of the very highest value and interest. "Our own matrimonial union", continued the Karauthmon with a smile, "took 150 years to bring about, and I well recollect the thrilling excitement of what is called the culminating point, that is to say, when having formed a perfect matrimonial unity of six we singly and collectively courted the seventh, who by the mutual affection that happily arose between himself and the six other members of the group at last crowned the edifice of our common felicity." "And do you really mean to tell me", I exclaimed with some disgust for this polygamous kind of familism, jarred extremely with my dualistic being's sense of propriety, "do you really mean to tell me that, when the curtain descends upon your protracted courtship, there is nothing to conceal which would mar the romance of your chess-playing and long-winded love-making? When with infinite difficulty our novel-writers have brought some unlucky couple together to share the feast of love's delights, they wisely make it an invariable rule to close the book before the banquet begins, lest the reader should be confounded by the sud-

den hail of flying pots and pans. And when once a misguided wight, having committed the crime of trigamy, hitherto unheard of in the district to which he belonged, the judges, being commissioned to devise a punishment more terrible than any hitherto invented as an example and a warning to mankind, condemned him to live with his three wives, the miserable wretch was found a very few days afterwards suspended from the lamp-post outside his own front door. That a matrimonial alliance consisting of seven individuals should be anything else than a perfect Pandemonium passes the comprehension of my poor intelligence." "And yet", said the Karauthmon, "impossible as it may appear to your mondaine way of thinking it is none the less true that domestic quarrels are unheard of in the planet of the seven sexes. And this is perhaps partly due to the fact that the negativeness of our existence is only another word for its perfect liberty. We have no art, but the art of right living, consequently no Sèvres and Japanese vases for careless housemaids to upset and break, and therefore no need of servants for its preparation, neither have we any houses with their long train of domestic worries, nor any clothes with the endless disputes they entail upon man and wife about their cut and payment for them. In a word, we have no need for your elaborate arts and artifices to supply the deficiencies of nature and to distract your mind from the grotesqueness and defects, from the squalor and deformity of your personal and bodily development, and thus we find in the natural emotions of our hearts and the exercise of our intellect and imagination all that you strive in vain to supply yourselves with by an elaborate and toilsome manipulation of external matter and external force, while all your efforts end at last only in blasting the fair face of the earth, filling the air with noisome vapours, and degrading the individuals of your species, in proportion as you elaborate but also pollute its natural surroundings. Again we have no disease and no fear of death, and consequently no systematised religions, no want and misery

and no unsatisfied desires with their attendant train of vice and crime, and consequently no political institutions of any kind nor any of the scandal mongering and social espionage and back-biting which poison all healthy corporate existence in your miserable little planet. And thus the naturally ordered current of our earthly existence flows on from the cradle to the grave in an eternal love-trance of unbroken felicity, ever varying like a summer's day with the unfettered changing play of the passions and the reason which form the substratum of all earthly forms of life."

The Karauthmon had spoken in the wonderful organ tones of his harmonious fugue-language which translated themselves automatically in my mind into human forms of speech. He paused a moment, and then continued with a certain tone of melancholy in his voice:—"But on our family does indeed rest the shadow of a curse which, unless through your instrumentality it can be obviated, is likely before very long to doom us all to a lingering death of disease and misery; a fate, the prospect of which I all the more poignantly regret because it is through my investigations into your pernicious little planet, the home of disease and sin in their worst and most degrading forms, that all this misery is likely to come about. In fact, it is owing to the too close intimacy which I have succeeded in establishing between myself and your corrupt and corrupting species by certain mysterious processes, that the contagion of your corruption threatens to find its way into our hitherto happy planet, how great must be my responsibility at such a conjuncture you can perhaps more or less be able to realise; happily the very means by which I have been able to come to close quarters, so to say, with your race of developed monkeys, at the risk of thereby destroying the life of perfect harmony and healthy activity by which the Planet of the sevenfold unity has hitherto been blessed promise also to provide a remedy and an antidote to the threatened evil. Let me explain myself more fully." "I cannot understand", I ventured to ob-

serve, "how what you say is true, because it is a certainly established fact at least among all the civilised races of mankind, that our planet, although not the centre of the physical universe, is most assuredly that of the moral order and that a certain individual who about two thousand years ago was unjustly gibbeted by a Roman governor in a small corner of Asia Minor, is the moral and physical regenerator of every species of intellectual being that ever has or ever will live in any form, on any system of inhabitable matter to the furthest limits of the milky way and, indeed, as far beyond it as any kind of inhabitable and inhabited worlds exist or by any conceivable chance may exist." "I do not wish to argue with you, my little pigmy", said the Karauthmon, taking me up in his hand and stroking me affectionately, "although it certainly does seem strange that the mere investigation of your species after they have been subjected for two thousand years to the influence of this patent regenerative system, should threaten ours with so direful a blight. That which I wish to do is to inform you what the threatened evil is, and how with your co-operation I hope to meet it." The Karauthmon here went into a minute description of the manner in which the Karauthmic race is propagated: out of deference to the bombazeen oracle of the Ephesians so often alluded to in these pages—the immaculate Mrs. Grundy—I abridge this part of the Karauthmon's narrative, only mentioning so much of it as is absolutely necessary for the right understanding of what follows. The Karauthmon explained to me that after a matrimonial union of seven was completed a brood of young Karauthmach also invariably seven in number was sooner or later produced. This occurred with the precision and certainty of an infallible piece of clockwork which sets in motion a procession of figurine or causes a cock to crow and flap its wings. In their relation to this process the seven Karauthmic individuals who constituted a matrimonial union had received special names which are successively as follows:—

1. The Jednal, 2. The Vejtsal, 3. The Hinthial, 4. The Parthal, 5. The Mandejl, 6. The Nebesban, 7. The Synthal.

In reproduction of a group of young Karauthmach the Vejtsal produced an egg which in process of time on being handed over to the Hinthial divided into two. These halves were then taken charge of by the Parthal and again subdivided, developing into four beings in all respects as to form and attributes similar to human beings. But the process did not stop here. On being placed under the care of the Mandejl a still further subdivision took place. Of the human looking embryos who were called by the way Estalach in Parthal, three divided into three separate entities, the fourth into four. Under the Nebesban three of the trisected beings remained unchanged, the four who had been formed by the quartering of the Estalon again halved forming eight separate entities, five of the six formed by the trisection of the other two Estalach also halved forming ten entities, while the sixth divided into twenty-one frusta, one of which attached itself to each of the twenty-one creatures formed by the subdivision of the other twelve.

In the last stage of all, under the superintendence of the Synthal, a synthetic process took place. The twenty-one members of the previous group coalescing in threes to form seven perfectly developed young Karauthmach. "You will remember", said the Karauthmon continuing (I here reproduce exactly what he said) "that when Arotholyess yaluth-ze'd, (that is voluntarily quitted life), he first swallowed a small seed and then turned and gazed at the setting sun. This seed was from one of those tall aloes-like looking trees which you noticed on your first arrival in the planet of the sevenfold unity. These tree-like looking growths belong in reality to a genus of plants closely allied to the terrestrial hemp and are in fact among the largest examples of our scanty dicotyledonous vegetation. The seeds which they produce play an important part in the evolution of our race, indeed, without them it would not exist at all. For just

as in human organisms the effect of *cannabis indica* (indian hemp or Gunjah) is to make the person who takes it feel as though his consciousness was divided into several individuals so in the actual states of our early embryonic life the drug is employed to bring about those complicated subdivisions of our imperfectly developed offspring which result finally in the evolution of a brood of seven fully developed Karauthmach. The egg on being laid and sat upon by the Hinthial halves of its own accord, it is when we come to the four Estalach in Parthal that the drug has to be used to carry on the next two stages of development producing first thirteen and in the next stage twenty-one embryonic organisms which in the last stage of all coalesce by threes to form the seven perfected young Karauthmach. Our atrophied stomachs, therefore, although no longer necessary for the process of nutrition, perform an important function in helping us into the world, and when the time has come for us to withdraw from material existence, in helping us out of it again." "The latter of your observations would equally apply to the terrestrial wallet", I observed parenthetically, "only that this irrepressible organ performs its office only too effectually without the aid of any Mithridatic drug." "However this may be", continued the Karauthmon without further heeding my last remark, "you will perceive that the seed of our giant cannabis has a close and important bearing upon the life history of our race, in fact we could neither come into existence nor die without it, from which it may pretty certainly be inferred that our species was not evolved before the plant but either *pari passu* with it or subsequent to its first appearance in its present form." "That is a very sensible and right inference", I remarked, "and I wonder our geologists by a similar system of induction do not arrive at some more satisfactory palæontological chronology than they have attained as yet. Just as our meteorologists, knowing the maximum and minimum rainfalls for certain districts in certain periods and the average rainfall for the periods,

ought to be able to predict with more or less certainty, when half a period has elapsed, the amount of rain that will fall in the other half.

(Note: Let us suppose two overlapping periods thus:

If the maximum rainfalls in one are a and b , the amount of rainfall in period one varies between a and b . When half the period has elapsed, the amount of rain that has fallen in it is known, call this quantity c , then the quantity of rain that will fall in the second half of the period will be approximately reached by saying that it is a quantity varying between a and $b-c$, and this quantity will approximate more closely to the truth in proportion as a and b the maxima and minima have been accurately determined, and the range from one to the other is small. Supposing the maximum and minimum for the next period to be d and e , both smaller than a and b , the quantity for the second half will be $d-e-(a-b-c)$, and if c is a small quantity, the rainfall in the second half of the first period will be relatively great and will therefore determine with an approach to accuracy the rainfall in the second half of the second period.)

“But some two thousand years ago”, continued the Karauthmon, apparently not altogether well pleased at the growing tendency of my mind to revert to terrestrial concerns, “the members of the matrimonial union deputed in those days to investigate your solar system, that member of it, in fact, who was occupied with your little earth, made an extraordinary discovery. He found in a word that in the North-West of Hindustan, in that district called at the present day the Punjab, was a race of beings with whom he could put himself ‘en rapport’ by means of the mystic seed of life and death. The way he made the discovery was remarkable. He had been ordered by the Perriddez to yaluth and had delayed the formality until the very last moment of evening. The sun was already sinking below the Western horizon when a large band of Karauthmach flying in the line of sight

between him and the half occulted star of day, completely obscured the brilliance of its rays. As they were flying in the direction in which the Karauthmon who should have yaluth-ze'd stood, they cut off its light for so long. that, when at last it was again visible, its beams were no longer strong enough to combine with the mystic seed in carrying out the operation of death. The Karauthmon was thus spared at all events for another night, and he decided to devote his last hours on earth to a final study of your terrestrial planet. Now I must here remark, that hitherto no member of our race had ever eaten the mystic seed of life and death except in the operation of birth and dying. The natural and no doubt wisely implanted instincts of our inmost selves revolted against the idea of using it at any other period of our material lives. Great therefore was the astonishment of the Karauthmon, to find himself, the moment he turned his instruments in the direction of your earth, suddenly endowed with a supermortal perspicacity and clearness of intellect, at the same time that an intense yearning came upon him to establish some sort of connection between himself and the higher inhabitants of your planet. All at once, as his vision ranged over your mottled earth-pellet, he found his desire an accomplished fact. All at once, he found himself in conversation with a race of beings in most respects resembling yourself, but dressed in flowing robes of striped cloth formed of grey and white camel's hair and wearing high turbans of a fine brown linen cloth also with stripes but of embroidered gold upon it. They were seated in simple broadly gabled wooden houses upon spacious divans immersed in astronomical calculations and speculations of a transcendental kind. By their side stood golden goblets filled with the juice of the sacred Soma-plant, the secret of whose marvellous powers has long been lost in Hindustan. It is known, indeed, that the Soma-plant was a kind of Aselepiä. It is not known, however, what gave it its magical properties, what secret ingredient it was that inspired those ancient Rishis of the

Punjab who composed the four primitive Rig-Vedas, to write hymns, that surpass in magnificence the inspired religious writing of any other nation upon earth. It is not known to what is due the wonderful scientific pre-science of the Vedantic intuition. This an accident revealed to the Karauthmon I am speaking of. The seed of life and death he had swallowed put him en rapport with those ancient Rishis of the Punjab, because the active principle of the Soma-mixture was the juice of the Indian hemp so closely allied in properties and by natural affinities with our seed of life and death, the Asclepias being added to give it an agreeable flavour (as we have observed before, an important element in the effect which the Gunjah produces) and also to prevent the secret of the mystic weed and its marvellous properties from becoming divulged among the common herd. It need hardly be said, that, having made this discovery, the Karauthmon felt justified in disregarding the order to yaluth of the Perriddez which itself soon after fully endorsed and indeed formally approved his act of insubordination.

Much interesting information was thus gained of the ancient Rishis of the great Aryan brotherhood and it may be surmised also that something of the wonderful insight of the primitive Vedantic intuition was due to this intimate communion with ourselves. At last, the Karauthmon, who made the discovery felt it his duty to yaluth, and to his successor in the investigation of your planet was entrusted the task of continuing his method of observation. But by this time the primitive society of the Aryan brotherhood was fast losing its pristine virtue and simplicity and at the same time the secret of the sacred Soma-juice, which had been one of the strictest religious mysteries of those ancient Rishis, was also rapidly becoming desecrated by its misapplication, in the hands of the careless many, to merely vulgar pleasure and to minister to the animal passions of those who were acquainted with its powers. The legend of the fall became in that primitive community a reality and the poison

of the human depravation reacted upon the Karauthmic sage who was unsuspectingly placed en rapport with its blighting influence. Its evil effects showed themselves in the matrimonial union of which he formed a part. As though the impress of a depraved humanity had cast a malignant spell upon his family and wished to stamp itself upon our race when the time for the seven young Karauthmach to develop came, a dreadful and unheard of thing in the history of our race happened. The egg was duly laid and divided in Hinthial, but instead of forming four Estalach in Parthal, behold! only three sinister human forms appeared, and the further stages of subdivision and concretion, it was found, could not by any means be brought about. Under these circumstances the supreme council of the Perriddez ordered the whole family instantly to yaluthze—when it was found to the horror of all that it was impossible to perform the death-operation. They and the sinister human-shaped embryo continued to live, or rather to die through many years of lingering torment. Since then no one has ever ventured to employ the sacred seed of life and death for anything but its legitimate purpose, until about seventeen years ago, shortly before the birth of our first brood, in an evil hour, as it may prove to our matrimonial union, we decided that we would forego any further family and that I should see if I could place myself en rapport with some one or other of the Eastern Mystics. The attempt succeeded but too well. It was the shrine of Poojerabad that I beheld and—but I refrain to speak of those desecrated mysteries. Years passed, and the whole affair also passed away from my recollection, when a decree from the Perriddez was issued in consequence of the small number of matrimonial alliances that had been formed for several years and the fear of too great a diminution of the population—that every family who had only had one brood of offspring should immediately produce another. At first I hesitated whether I should obey the mandate, then I made up my mind to lay my own parti-

cular case before the Perriddez and to beg to be exempted, then, being unwilling to confess an action which I knew but too well would meet with general reprehension, I or rather we determined to risk obeying the decree and produce the required brood of young Karauthmach. We attempted it (this was only quite lately) when to our dismay precisely what happened in the family of the previously ill-fated Karauthmon happened with ours; the egg was duly laid and divided in Hinthial but, as on the former occasion, only three sinister looking Estalachs appeared in Parthal instead of four. We hushed the matter up only confiding it out of our own circle to Arotholyess, the Karauthmon whom you saw yaluthze yesterday. Meantime an idea occurred to me. I determined to take the bull by the horns and, by again employing the mystic seed of life and death, putting myself in communication with humanity to see whether it might not be possible to discover some remedy for our misfortune. To my immense amazement and relief I found myself en rapport with a magnificent Hindoo, who assured me I should find the missing Estalon at a particular spot, at a particular time on the Planet of the sevenfold unity. Elaborate mathematical formulæ were given to find the exact spot and the hour, when I awoke from my mystic communion with the terrestrial mystic. To our every day life the formulæ remained firmly impressed upon my mind, I wrote them down hastily, worked them out, hurried to the spot where the Estalon was to be and found it just as had been predicted, it was—"And so this", I exclaimed indignantly, "is the purpose for which I have been kidnapped hither", in an access of fury I could not well restrain. "Atrocious and cruel monster, this is the horrid fate you have prepared for me, this the doom your egregious selfishness has seen fit to impose upon an unoffending mortal whole æons away from his simian kith and kin. Have you no mercy, no compunction in all that heap of fluff and feathers which compose yourself?" Softly replied the Karauthmon:—"Recollect, it was not we who

sent you hither on your voyage through the stars, all we had to do in the affair was to rescue you from death by starvation when we found you on our planet." "That is true" I replied, my sense of justice gaining for the moment the upper hand, "it is the hateful Indian mystic who is at the bottom of it all. But what is to be done? You cannot send me back to earth?" "That is an impossibility", said the Karauthmon, "on the other hand, if you would accede to our urgent request and become one or rather several of us, you might live for centuries our life of unblemished happiness." "You mean—", I began and stopped short, a cold shiver running down all my spinal column. "How many of your simian kith and kin", pleaded the Karauthmon, "from Prometheus, Orpheus and Socrates downwards have died to promote what they imagined was the welfare of their race, which, however, does not seem to have benefited, particularly by the long line of Saviours of society, ending with a whole hen-roost of frizzled saints and heretics which have imposed themselves upon it; even your own most honoured religious teachers recommend their followers to be born again, could you not follow their advice for once, and as your race's confirmed habit of butchering one another and dying for one another for the sake of some great regenerating idea, (they are only two sides of the same process), has proved such a dismal failure, so far as any benefit to mankind is concerned supposed to have been conferred upon it in the process, could you not, I say, for once in a way consent to be born again to save from a dismal fate a family of harmless beings, perhaps a whole nation, who have never done you any injury and have already once saved your life." "And do you suppose", I exclaimed angrily, that, when our inspired prophets and teachers spoke of being born again they ever meant it in anything but a purely metaphorical and figurative sense? Do you suppose that any of our great theologians and divines however extravagant and original their practice and advice at times may have been, would ever have recom-

mended any member of the flock of the good shepherd—even the most obstinately vagabond bell-wether of the troop—to be born again in the dissolute form of giblet-soup—to find salvation and regeneration as minced chicken?” For a moment the Karauthmon looked very angry at this tirade, but, remembering the greatness of the interests that were at stake, he controlled the indignation he felt at my gratuitous insults, and I continued:—“How dare you suggest that I should sacrifice my blessed human individuality, that pure existence that in its most perfect forms is to be regarded as the centre of the moral and spiritual universe (whatever that may be), how dare you to suggest, that I should sacrifice this for any amount of barn-door fowls, however triangular, however scientifically put together, however big and however virtuous they may be. How dare you suggest, that I should distribute that blessed individuality, as a kind of chicken-food among half a dozen overgrown bantams. It will be a hard enough task for the creator of all worlds to separate sublimated bodily envelopes from one another at the last day and get every soul properly stowed away in its own pickle-pot, but I defy him even with the aid of Messrs. Cayley, Sylvester and de Morgan, and all the most skilful professors of the science of perturbations, probabilities and mathematical series to make anything of my unlucky individuality, if it is to be chopped up in all sorts of haphazard proportions in association with your dichotomous offspring and then to solidify into three-legged Jovian eagles.” “But”, suggested the Karauthmon mildly, checking the flow of my indignant rhetoric, “you look at things in a very irrational and one-sided manner. If you became seven individuals instead of one, naturally your individuality would be seven times greater than it was before, add to which, owing to our closer and more intimate union with nature and our simpler and purer lives our individuality, is at first start off infinitely more intense and real than that of your blundering monkey race, so that you would

be a gainer from every point of view. And are you so very certain of your unity in your present state of being", he continued, taking me up in his hand with a gentle forbearance which went to my heart, and focussing the strongest lenses of his microscopic eyes upon me at the same time indefinitely enlarging his field of vision. I felt extremely uncomfortable under this minute scrutiny. "So far as I can make out", said the Karauthmon, "even now you are nothing but an enormous collection of all sorts of low forms of life, amoebe, protezoa, threads of fungus spawn, microscopic lice, vibria's, bacteria and the secretions of all the worms which have somehow shaken together and coalesced in a certain form just as the threads of innumerable hyphomycetous fungi (moulds) coalesce to form a perfect mushroom. Believe me, you couldn't be in a state of greater entanglement and confusion than you are at present." "And even supposing what you say is true", I said, addressing him from the palm of his hand and somewhat taken aback by his last remark, "and I were to consent to this precious form of regeneration, this chaffering and dove-tailing and mortising business of the nth' part of me in combination with the Lord knows how many parts of your precious young chickens, turns out a hopeless reprobrate and the mth part in combination with the Lord knows how many other parts of your young ne'er-do-well's turn out just the reverse, who is to strike the balance between the responsibility of the ingredients of these manifold unities, and even supposing this done, what a precious pickle I should be in for all eternity with 3/7 of my eternal consciousness tootling, away in a paradise of eternal happiness and the other four parts in a very different position?" "You forget", said the Karauthmon, putting me down with a gesture of disgust, "that we are pure intellectualisms and wholly incapable of sins and vice." "Perhaps so", I replied, "and terribly tedious you must find it being so. But can you guarantee that your race will long remain so, after it has been inoculated with the

poison of humanity which, it must frankly be admitted, is exactly the opposite of what you describe yourselves to be?" This suggestion evidently surprised the Karauthmon. He started, bit his lips and I saw looked uneasily and with an uncertain air at me as I gesticulated to him from the platform of the observatory. "Yes", I continued, developing this train of thought and hugging it as though it were a clue to lead me from the abyss, for it appeared to me like the flash of a bright inspiration, "who knows but what my transmission hither is but a crafty device of the Father of Evil himself to sow the seeds of human sin and wickedness in the Paradise of this hitherto stainless and unpolluted Eden? Were it not more heroic and more self sacrificing in your family to submit to a lingering death rather than render yourselves infamous to posterity as the channels through which sin and death were introduced into your world?" To such humiliating arguments I, who but now had imagined myself sent thither by an all-wise Providence as a sort of second and celestial Messiah was at length constrained to stoop in my eagerness to escape the shears of the Karauthmic regeneration. The Karauthmon was evidently deeply moved by my last argument. For a while he folded his magnificent wings across his back, and his strong muscular arms across his breast and remained lost in thought. After about a quarter of an hour he raised his head, looked full at me with his magnificent blue eyes and spoke as follows:—"In justice to yourself, poor mortal, at whatever risk to our race, I must leave you to decide what is to be. It is true, if born into our celestial race you may prove to be the vicious leaven which will ultimately corrupt our whole society. It were better, certainly better a thousand times, that our matrimonial union and yourself should perish miserably rather than this should happen. On the other hand, I am responsible in some measure for your banishment hither, and justice and mercy therefore both compel me (whatever I might now wish myself) to give you the power of choosing whether you will or not be born again

in our family's offspring. I feel bound to give you this choice, because it is your sole chance of saving your own life: if you continue here in your present human existence, you must infallibly die a hideous death of slow starvation, and I know of no possible means of sending you back to your simian kith and kin." As he pronounced these words a complete revulsion of feelings took place in my human pericranium. It was a matter of life and death then, not of the Karauthmic race but to my own precious human self. Could I hesitate a moment? Better pollute and brutalise every sublime and planetary existence until it sank below the level of the lowest human brute than for a single instant to jeopardise that of the moral centre of all the worlds, and of all possible existence. I no longer hesitated a moment, but insisted upon being at once incorporated into the Karauthmic's embryonic family. The suddenness of my change of front did not, I grieve to say, impress the Karauthmon with that respect for the human race which he should have felt. In fact, I thought I traced upon his superb features something very like contempt as he turned on his heel to fetch his fellow Karauthmach and left me alone in the now gathering darkness. In these moments of suspense I had time to realize the important step I was about to take. I stood, as it were, at the parting of the highway of existence, one road, the one traversed by the humanity of our earth-pellet turned back upon itself and ended perhaps very much as it began, the other went forward, bifurcated again and again led who knew through what strange experiences, ending at last who knew in what delirious ecstasy of agony and delight. In any novel experience there is always an element of enjoyment, which may account for the fact that often the people who have most shuddered at the idea of death take it most philosophically when it comes upon them, but in addition to this, in my present experience there was mingled a feeling of devilry, for it was an unconventional, perhaps a morally unholy thing I was going to do—and a consciousness also that

it was something that the terrestrial conscience would consider extremely wicked, which intensified the mystery and the delight of the affair a hundredfold. For it is a melancholy fact which the moralists may puzzle over as long as they please, but which they will never explain satisfactorily that the sense of doing something one ought not is of all others that which gives the greatest and it may be said the cheapest and most harmless pleasure to by far the greatest part of that strange bundle of contradictions—poor humanity, while on the other hand the frequent commission of the wrong deed tends to mar the pleasure of it not for any horror of sin in itself—which is a purely artificial growth of consciousness—but for a very opposite reason, in fact, just because the delicious flavour of romantic wickedness that invested sin's joyous springtide and first inauguration, inevitably evaporates as soon as it gains a kind of official sanction by being incorporated as part of the regular routine of commonplace every day existence. If humanity could be inveigled into the belief that everything it did was somehow more or less a hankering after forbidden fruit, its life on earth would be an immeasurably happier one than religion has as yet succeeded in rendering it. Not but what on the occasion of which I am now writing a sense of dread and apprehension mingled with the palpitating delight I felt—the sort of dread and apprehension blending with a supreme joy which fulminates the heart of a profligate as he stands upon the verge of some iniquity he has never before had the courage to commit, and revels in anticipation of raptures, whose reality he well knows will utterly eclipse the most glowing prescience of his intoxicated imagination.

And nature herself contributed to deepen and intensify the lurid ecstasy-smitten moment of passion. A thick blanket of dark purple clouds had spread itself over the greater part of the evening sky, in compact horizontal layers only along the horizon itself, particularly towards the west, ran a broad band of burnished sky which the

star of day was now slowly traversing on its way to the underworld of ghosts and spirits. As it flung its coruscating rays in all directions, the landscape assumed a deep copper colour, the shadows of the astronomical instruments, the gigantic cupolas and the pyramids lay like night upon the vast level pavement, while those portions of masonry which caught the light glowed like red hot furnaces or like objects seen through the medium of dark red tinted glasses.

Just as the lower limb of the sun touched the clearly defined line of the horizon, the seven Karauthmach silently gathered round me upon the platform, one of them leading the three Estalach in Parthal. Their magnificent wings, which they had opened to the full extent, flushed an intense ruddy bronze in the concentrated beams of the perishing day-light even throwing a faint reflection upon the sombre surface of the platform standing as they did in a large circle and facing inwards round me, and the three other Estalach, whom they had placed in the middle, their shadows crossed one another and formed where we four stood a disc of the deepest night, while in the darkness it was difficult to know whether to regard these superhuman winged ones as something sinister and demonic, like the fates and genii of Greece and the Eastern world, or as angelic guardians, beings of mercy and benevolence, who surrounded us to shield us from the evil powers who hovered in that mirky atmosphere of lurid gloom and sombre illumination. In that supreme moment of my fate I looked at the three dusky figures that stood beside me. It was difficult to distinguish anything very clearly in the gathering darkness, but in two of the three human-looking forms I seemed to recognise with a shuddering horror that fixed me to the ground, the forms of Chundra Singh and the Ayah Churi Puri, the face of the third figure which was swarthy, naked all but a filthy loin-cloth and apparently smeared with blood, was turned away, so that I could not say to what sort of human creature it might belong.

There was very little time for any close observation of my companions however, for at this moment the Mandejl held out his hand and solemnly proffered each of us one of the mystic seeds of life and death. We swallowed them simultaneously and at first, from the jubilant faces of the Karauthmach, it was evident that the tremendous experiment was progressing favourably. I can only describe very imperfectly what I remember of my own sensations. So far as I recollect, a feeling of the most extreme content and happiness overspread my whole bodily and mental consciousness, filling it with delight as a symphony of one of the great masters, performed by an adequate orchestra, fills the concert-room or cathedral in which it is given and yet, when I think the matter over, this sense of bliss in reality had its root not in anything within or without me, but in the miraculous clearness and hardness with which everything was now perceived in consciousness, as though the external and the inorganic had become an integrate part of me. This feeling grew and grew with an accelerating force of intensity, culminating at last in a sense of violent rending or wrenching, which would have been agony had not the throbs been succeeded by gushes of the most exquisite delight, when all at once a dark cloud seemed to obscure everything; in a moment, far away, down in the very heart of all things, I heard something twang like a broken bow-string, and with it came a sigh of infinite despair, at the same time I thought I could distinguish the words:—"he's gone, after all it was but a by-product of our existence, an excrescence of our dreaming spirits", and I then became aware that somehow my being had detached itself from the Planet of the sevenfold unity, and that I had left those seven mysterious beings standing in a circle upon the platform of their Karauthmic observatory, with their shadowy wings spread out above their heads to the cruel fate of the other Karauthmic family that had defiled itself by too close a contact with our world and its pestiferous simian civilisation. I did not exactly feel

remorse, but everything seemed awry and to jar within me; and then, as sometimes happens to a person suffering from sleeplessness through excessive tea-drinking, my thoughts began to swarm like a hive of bees and afterwards to direct themselves with a virulent animosity against what seemed to be an abuse that needed reformation. What scheme after scheme was hastily adopted only to be summarily discarded and replaced by another! My mind lashed itself into fury at the thought of the arrogance with which my fellow-countrymen treated that half of the great Aryan brotherhood which has been established for so many ages in Hindustan, and which accident, fate or providence has placed under the rule of one of the most advanced nations of the other—the western half of that great brotherhood, at all events most advanced in its own estimation.

Our present position in India, our acquirement of that great dependency, the reintegration thereby of the two greatest, most widely diverging and most characteristic branches of the Aryan brotherhood, together forms perhaps the most romantic page of all in the history of civilised mankind; by the junction of the most restless and progressive branch of our race with the most sedentary and conservative, a priceless opportunity has been offered to each for mutual culture, and for mutually correcting the excesses and faults, naturally consequent upon extremes whether of mobility or of immobility. England offers to Hindustan all the glorious promise of the future, Hindustan in return reveals to us all the garnered treasures of the past, woe to us both, if either lets slip the great opportunity of rejuvenescence and national reintegration, either through racial hatred, Christian arrogance or the poison of party-spirit. And perhaps in this great and living readjustment between the past and the future individualism—the child-life of the present will again find itself—the two oceans of thought will run together and the dew-drop of the soul will shine forth unsullied, like one tiny star in the immeasurable diadem

of the heavens, as it shone for a brief moment in that golden age of the world when nature and childhood were supreme, before old age and the apery of imitation had forged the huge chain of tyranny, link after link in time, and slavishly reproducing the abuses and injustice of the century that preceded it. And if this ever come about, and the monstrous claims of what poor humanity calls its revealed religion, to impose itself as absolute truth upon the whole creation of the expanded universe through space and time be quietly laid to rest in the grave of exploded superstitions, Christianity itself may be a gainer, may even be generally accepted and admired at last as a tiny spangle of light and a tiny flash of dew in the majestic temple of nature and of infinity. These thoughts naturally drew my mind to speculate upon the early brotherhood of our race, before the two streams flowed from their racial watershed somewhere in Central Asia, (whatever the primitive home of all may have been), one stream south westward stagnating in the huge lagoons of Hindustan, the other ramifying east and north, irrigating the European continent and at last pouring its superfluous populations over the whole western and southern hemisphere. By a natural association of ideas and by the law of contrast these thoughts recalled to my mind my own childhood; the little brother buried long ago in the forgotten grave, the early destroyed hopes of a life of mutual dualistic happiness, the tangled forest of the hay-field and the strange apparition of the planet hanging in the summer sky surrounded by its seven moons. And a strange thought occurred to me, accompanied by a strange refrain or resonance in my mind. The thought was that the nævus of which my little brother had died was like one of those lotus-flowers which grew out of the sacred tank and were symbols of the evolution of material existence, and that the caoutchouc ring with which the doctors had striven to compress it and bind it round was like the mystic ring in the hand of the Blessed Vishnu, or the Ananda ring which Kama had so wantonly lavished on

the swarthy Nautch-girl. And accompanying this thought, came the refrain or a sort of resonance in the mind: "The ring on the lotus drew him to her". What it meant, I could not the least conjecture at the time; it seemed but an idle catch-word; perhaps at the end of the story the reader may imagine he finds in it a certain sense and coherency. And suddenly, as these thoughts absorbed my mind, the eyes of my mind, the eyes of my intelligence were opened, and far away, like a small white disc, surrounded by its seven satellites, I saw hanging in the abysmal depths of space, that strange Planet of the sevenfold unity and heard in imagination the dying cry of the perishing death-stricken family of the seven Karanahmach . . .

CHAPTER XV

THE AYAH

And behold! Again I was the night-heaven with its myriads and myriads of eyes flashing out of the purple darkness like sparks, flung upwards from the roaring abyss of matter; but the stars paled in the wan sheen of the moonshine that spread like a winding sheet over the sleeping heavens and rested upon the dark bier of the earth; from a rose-bush sang a nightingale, and in the west burned the last crimson reflections of the sunset like the rose she sang of.

Kama passed hurriedly along the colonnades of the tank and a stone's throw beyond the Mosque-temple to the eastward of it. Here he was to wait for the Nautch-girl. Not forgetful of her instructions, he now took the fragment of gunjah or hashish she had given him, put it in his mouth and had soon swallowed it. It left an agreeable aromatic taste there and a slight sensation of burning about the lower part of the gullet. And then all at once came the never-to-be-forgotten thrill that he had felt the

night before at the Nautch and fireworks, but this time a thousand times more powerful. It caught the song of the nightingale in its vibrations and made of it a mighty orchestra of sound, a symphony that blended with the colours of the west whose sunset hues were now also tones and harmony. And flashing white in the moonlight, like a dream dreamed by a god, that had been frozen into marble by the breath of desire, stood out the glorious temple with its three alabaster cupolas like three symbols of eternity. The thought that it was so soon to be the home of his desire awoke an agony of pleasure in Kama's mind, an agony, that seemed to split up and ramify into a thousand different splinters of delight, like the rays of light in deep water on a hot summer's day when you stand with your back to the midday sun and then the reflection, that all those gracefully fretted minarets and cloud-like domes, that all that ethereal loveliness was all spun out of gross solid matter, somehow woke within him a further agony of delight, it broke within him like a thousand morning-suns, as though his mind was the night-heaven and over every portion of its space blazing orbs were being bodied forth, until the whole was but a vast flaming sword of electric fire. And now, as his consciousness expanded into states of being of which the wildest and most fantastic imagery would be incapable of giving the faintest notion, the song of the nightingale had won itself words—that rang with plaintive sweetness through the summer-night, but which to his drugged phantasy seemed as though they were the heart of nature itself—speaking and explaining all that was enigmatical in our earthly state—until even vile things seemed heavenly merely because they were material. While it lasted, doubtless the solution of the riddle of existence was complete only unluckily the mind could not carry it back with it into the state of normal consciousness—it fled like a pale Eurydice to the shades below.

But even to the ears whose perceptive faculties had not been magnified so to say, by artificial means, the

song the Nautch-girl sung from behind the myrtle-bush, whose flowers trembled even in the still air as it clung beside the ruined wall, had a certain charm of melancholy about them. They plunged him into other worlds and bade him look to things material as the only hope of rest for a world-wearied heart. The melody was an Indo-gipsy one, that and the words both drawn from the deep underworld of popular life, which nowhere is more completely an echo or rather an expression of external nature than it is in India; if it only could become articulate, how it would transform our ideas of everything. The following is but a feeble imitation of the Nautch-girl's song as she sung it. Such as it is I give it. Ah, little did she know what an irony lay in the words she warbled so touchingly:—

“Oh! forgive me, mother darling,
That I chose a foreign mate,
That I loved him, ah, too fondly,
Who had better won my hate.

What a surge of love and passion
Thrilled me, thou canst never know,
When I first had felt his presence
Heard his voice in music flow.

Oh! I'm faint with aching sorrow,
And my tears have turned to gall,
He has broke the bonds that bound him,
False and traitors are they all.

Yet, I love him, though his image
Blots the night and blurs the day.
Like the ghost of joy it haunts me,
Haunts and beckons me away.

How can I find joy or comfort
In the wide world, aught but ill,
All is foreign to my fancy
Since he fooled me to his will.

Mother, take me to thy bosom,
Bathe with tears my fevered brow.
‘All in all to one another,
Ah! Who else can love me now.

Perhaps these verses described some real experiences of the Nautch-girl. At any rate she sang them with as much passionate feeling as though they did. What her history was, I cannot say. She was known by various names, the commonest perhaps being Rarde Lal, which was popularly supposed to have been taken out of compliment to Mohun Lal, her patron. Perhaps, however, the name she most favoured herself was Panch Phal Ranee, which she had assumed after a famous queen of ancient Hindoo romance and fairy lore, and by that name we will call her. Born in Benares though of Dravidian descent and brought up among the “people”, that is to say, a caste of dancers, jugglers and musicians, she had early become a popular favorite, whether to her own personal advantage need not here be inquired. But whether these verses described any real experience of her own or not, they doubtless did depict very truly and with a cruel irony the position of her luckless rival, the beautiful Lasa, and showed considerable audacity on her part and a strong conviction of her powers of seduction, to elect, to enchant and bewitch Lasa’s faithless lover with them. But Panch Phal Ranee knew masculine human nature well. She knew its variety, she knew its fickleness. And she knew also that by adroitly trimming the sails of the one and handling the tiller of the other, the heavy inert mass of human passion could be made to navigate in any direction you chose to propel it to. That was true according to the axioms of her carefully tested female wisdom—(and what female wisdom was ever anything but practical and material)—even of normal states of consciousness. But under the influence of hashish, all the faculties of the mind become enlarged, inflated; while the moral sense ceases to exist, and so the ideal of Lasa’s

despair at his—Kama's—loss appealed to his vanity, and as the picture of her agony stood before him with greater and greater vividness in the intensifying consciousness of the ha-hish-delirium, he perfectly reveiled in the thought of it, particularly when he contrasted it with the unspeakable felicities which were prepared for him, and which a very few moments hence he should enjoy in the arms of his new love under the sacred shadow of the shrine of Vishnu. And then the beautiful Nautch-girl, muffled in a flame-coloured robe of diaphanous silk-muslin, herself drew near—he ceased to breathe—she was by his side—they were in the shrine together, and all the rest is indescribable. Whole eternities of time and space fled past, whole creations were bodied forth out of the infinite body of the heavenly Vishnu, and cries of delight were wrung from the wondering lips of the joyous couple.

But for others the curtain must remain unwithdrawn. Who has any right to pry into the mysteries of two enamoured hearts, when the veil of things seems rent in twain, and they hear the first echo of the music of the immortals, I, the spangled night-heaven, that look down for ever upon human joy and misery, could sympathise with only half their mystic orgy—the human passion that made of it to them so ravishing a vision of immortal bliss—all this is a sealed book to me. The flash of the stars that might have interpreted it to me, loses itself in the immensities of the abyss of nothingness, which forms the fabric of my being. But outside the shrine and over the fields of rice and maize and among the platanes at Pindawar the dead immortalised moon shrouded everything in its own sober light or cast dark shadows, so that the trees robed in swarthy foliage looked like mourners standing round a bier. And within the house silence reigned; the silence of the dead and the silence of a young heart that trembled between life and death. Lasa, in whose movements to anyone who had seen her in her present state a strange kind of jerky mechanism would have been apparent, wandered listlessly up and down

the deserted rooms and passages of the bungalow. From time to time she turned the ring round upon her finger and the old sunny smile of her happy hours with Kama beamed a moment upon her pale face, but only at intervals, and even this recurred mechanically, as if it also had been tampered with and bribed to take part in the treachery to the young life that, spell-bound, now only throbbed and quivered in the current of events that had been contrived for its destruction. And every time she turned the ring she wandered further about the house and at last wandered into the chamber where the murdered Ranee lay in her trance of death. Lasa knelt beside the bed on which the corpse was laid; but no tears, no emotion of any kind came; she felt inclined to laugh, and then the laughter jarred upon her as though it was some impish alien thing outside her in the air. Then she took a scarf of white diaphanous silk with a border of heavy gold embroidery, threw it about her neck and head and went out into the garden. Mechanically she wandered to the Magnolia tree and vainly examined the white globe-like flowers. But they contained no message of love this evening and many of them were stained and blemished by the thunderstorm of the other day. Then she took the pathway among the platanes across the road out into the moonlight among the fields of rice and maize, where a few crickets still sung intermittently, as if the electric energy they drew from the moonlight was only sufficient to work in shifts. Here and there, where there was a patch of damp meadow, a few fire-flies sped on tracks of fire up and down like winged watchmen, but their lamps burnt wan and ghastly in the moonlight and were hardly discernible except at the end of each of their short sagging flights. And now she came into the deep shadow of the ruined wall; over which a huge cobra was just gliding. It reared its crest and hissed in a threatening manner, but then slipped backward off the wall and no doubt glided away into some chink or crevice. Lasa entered the colonnades, and all at once it seemed to her she was in

that underworld of her dreams with the hunch-backed dwarf who fixed her for ever with his steel-blue eyes. She shuddered, and the words formed themselves mechanically in her mind: "You cannot escape me now," again she shuddered. And then a sort of terror seized her that was also half a hope. To be fixed by those steel-blue eyes and then to feel his fingers about her throat and to gasp in the agony of strangulation. Would it after all be so very terrible? Little by little the idea attracted her. She drew nearer to the pillar against which she had leant when in the delirium of happiness she first saw Kama. Again she leant against it, and mechanically touched a soiled straw that hung from the deserted weaver-bird's nest; the birds had long flown; but a fruit-eating bat, hanging head downwards beside the nest, was disturbed and glanced at her with its red, friendly sympathetic eyes, curled its viscid tongue about, and then rolled itself up and went to sleep again. Outside, the moonlight lay in floods of light upon the waters of the tank; a light breeze stirred the surface here and there among the broad patens of the lotus-leaves, and as Lasa's thoughts grew more abstracted and remote from exterior things, the flakes of moonlight began to look like groups or spangles of silver fire rushing up out of the depths of the waters and weaving and unweaving in a perpetual dance. And as she gazed and gazed, her thoughts grew more and more remote from exterior things, and now she hardly seemed to care whether Kama should come or not. Not a sound was to be heard; no footstep; even the Brahminy bull in the paddock behind the Pundit's house had gone to sleep; only from time to time, from the direction of the shrine, came wild half muffled cries of some strange unearthly kind of merriment which, she could not tell why, for a moment sent a stab of agony to her heart, and indeed half aroused her from her fatal torpor. But now an influence, she could not resist, slowly drew her head backward, so that the muscles almost seemed to creak inwardly, until it was at such an angle that by a slight effort of the mus-

cies of the eye-balls, Lasa could look at the spangle hanging from the bamboo which, as we have already mentioned, the Pundit had set up outside the colonnades. And the slight effort of the muscles came about also mechanically. And then, as the spangle completely fixed her attention, little by little the torpor and drowsiness increased, the muscles of the eye-balls stiffened and grew rigid, and this rigidity spread to her neck, shoulders and arms, so that at last every part of her body was benumbed. Lasa leant against the pillar there in a state of complete coma—beyond the sleep of dreamless spirits. Like some fair statue from the Grecian world, some Iphigenia in her stainless loveliness and purity of thought and form and life, she stood there like an angel's dream from the child-world of that classic past, spirited there into that gloomy vault of night and superstition by the grotesque demons of its underworld to perish in the abject hell of Vishnu and of Christ. To perish not before some stately altar of Parian marble, to the blare of silver trumpets, with the heavenly blue of the summer-sky above her head, among the white-robed priests of Hellas in all the dignity and glory of a sacrificial martyrdom, but done to death by the filthy juggleries of a foul religion of so-called Love and Mercy, the victim of a gross and sordid lust of murder, of vulgar murder, thumb marked with vulgar passions, with its chuckling laugh of comfortable certainty, religion's vampire of the slums and of the shambles that shunned the light of day. And religion's ministers of murder were near at hand. There was a hurried whispering that fluttered like an evil dream under the cornices, and a shuffling of feet among the colonnades, and then the tall and sinister figure of the Ayah, followed by the fat podgy minister of the Religion of Love, groped their way into the chiaroscuro beside the sleeping Lasa. There is something horrible in seeing the surgeon, even though his mission is one of true mercy and if possible of amelioration, fingering the inanimate form of his patient under anæsthetics, in seeing him peddling with the soft flesh

and then relentlessly laying nerve and muscle bare with his scalpel. But infinitely more horrible was it to see the Pundit and Churi Puri fumbling with the rigid statue-like body of the ill-fated Lasa, peddling with it, shampooing it, to make it soft and malleable enough to carry out in its hypnotised condition the "suggestions" which were to end in its destruction. One hardly sees why Chundra Singh and his sister in infamy, the female Thug, should not have had recourse to more direct means, perhaps however, in case any enquiries should be made, they wished to make it appear that the unfortunate girl had committed suicide, perhaps however, they merely took a hellish pride in carrying out their loathsome crime in a subtle and artistic manner, they may have even imagined the spiritualistic powers through which they worked were a sort of justification of the deed, raising it to the level of something supernatural and miraculous. However this may be, the Ayah now beckoned to Chundra Singh to stand a little aside, and making passes over her victim, addressed Lasa as follows:—"Look! Look! my pretty one. Kama, thy beloved, is at hand. The old Ayah has brought him to thee, see how his eyes sparkle with the light of desire at the sight of his virgin bride. Open thy arms, darling, to receive him, and may my darling's bridal be the prelude to eternal bliss." As she said these words, at a concerted signal, the Pundit approached the girl, with numping gestures, it tickled his fancy, that he should have to personate the slender graceful Kama in this treacherous piece of butchery, it was all like a broad burlesque, the Pundit thought, and could hardly restrain himself from bursting out into a coarse guffaw. He approached the girl and proffered her a small phial containing a transparent red fluid. "See, how redly are the lips of thy beloved, see, how he proffers them for thee to kiss, drink from them the honey of eternal life, and share with him the never ending delights of the earthly paradise of love and innocence." So spoke the Ayah; as she said the words, the Pundit stooped down a little still proffering

the phial; the girl seized it with trembling fingers, a smile of heavenly love irradiated her features for a moment, and with a wild sob of delight and passion she swallowed the contents of it at a draught. Almost instantly, however, her features changed and grew livid and a heart-rending cry, like that of a hare when the beagles are upon it and are just pulling it down, or the involuntary spasmodic exclamation of persons suffering from some form of renal disease, half broke from the girl's lips. As it did so, the Pundit hastily lifted his fat podgy hand with a certain swoop of dogmatic certainty, which, as we have before observed, is characteristic of those who are accustomed to handle religious mysteries, and crushed it down in an important manner upon the poor child's lips, looking slantwise at the Ayah, as he did so as much as to say: with this act I give a certain religious sanction to the affair. There was perhaps but little need for this precaution, at night-time the shrine and its precincts were utterly deserted; the village was at some distance away; by this time its inhabitants would be in bed and asleep, and even if any of them had happened to hear the cry, he would most likely have treated it in the apathetic manner of most orientals and simply turned over and gone to sleep again. But the Pundit felt that in any case it was desirable for the sake of completeness. The act crowned the edifice of butchery, so to say. It was the button on the top of the pagoda. The fluid contained in the phial consisted of a subtle vegetable alkaloid poison—one of the secrets of the higher caste of Thugs—this fluid was perfectly harmless to a person in a normal condition, but was almost instantaneously and infallibly fatal to a person in the hypnotic trance. The girl's agonised death-struggle did not last long; in a very few seconds, as we count time, all was over. So the innocent child-life, that had carolled with the birds in its joyous vitality, whose every pulse was as an echo of the joyous throbbing intense and passionate life of external nature, the voice of its very soul, the reflection of its heavenly loveliness,

of its stainless purity and unfettered liberty, was sordidly snuffed out of existence at the instance of the grovelling misbelief and no-faith of the minister of a so called religion of Love and Mercy, dominated by the cloying memories of a gross and vitiated past. The lotus had been ravished and deflowered. The beautiful Lasa now breathed no more.

When it was all over the Pundit, with his thick lips half parted and his thick garrulous tongue between his teeth like an infant's which clacks sated from the teat, stood in as commanding an attitude as he could assume, and indicating the corpse by pinching the yet warm cheeks between his podgy yellow finger and thumb, ordered the Ayah to help him to carry it to the tank; for he thought the safest and best thing for him to do would be to place it in the water, the lotus-leaves would entirely conceal it and the eels and tench would soon make short work of it. He would suspend his fishing for a few weeks. They lifted the poor lifeless form between them and soon deposited it at the spot where the Pundit was in the habit of carrying on his piscatorial operations. As they did so, the Ayah, unperceived by Chundra Singh, drew the Ananda ring off the slender child-like finger and threw it into the disc of the yellow lotus-flower whose petals had now fallen, leaving only the empty anthers and the ripening pod in which the seeds were contained. And then, like two foul birds of night, they shuffled off to the Pundit's house and the door closed upon them.

The following day dawned at length in all the splendour of the late summer. The agonised delight of the hashish orgy was over. Kama woke and found the shrine empty. Panch Phal Ranee, the Nautch-girl, had vanished. Only the statue lay there as ever, in its eternal and divine repose. All was lapped in shadow save the ring in one of the four hands of the deity, which a struggling ray of light from a window near the lofty roof gilded, so that it shone and glittered like a piece of transparent amber. It caught Kama's eye, and he gazed at it until it seemed

to revolve in the supple hand of the sculptured image of the god, and then his thoughts, too, went circling round one after the other like smoke wreaths, each wreath higher than the last, as he lived over again in memory the intoxicating pleasures of the past night. Nor was the absence of his beloved any source of anxiety or distress nor any bar to his retrospective happiness, for she had told him where she lived and begged him to visit her whenever he pleased, and he had promised himself that he would be with her again that very evening. But as he lived over again in memory the scenes of the past night, it came to him that the very acme of its indescribable delights was reached just as a stifled cry of agony from outside the temple smote upon his ear. Under the influence of the hashish the sound was prolonged and intensified, and the feeling of pain it produced within him was also magnified and deepened, so that it seemed as though his very being was rent in twain, and toppled over as it were, I can use no other expression, into another state of existence in which he himself was not; thought and passion had also fled and nothing was left but a freedom of enjoyment, which was its own existence without the interposition of thought or form or matter. Kama flung himself back upon the soft Persian carpets and mused and mused, that sense of something wanting which nothing in the whole universe could ever supply, was gone; in that shrine, at all events, where he had felt it first, it had now no place, he seemed to be a sharer in the divine ecstasy of the God's eternal love-trance, he had solved the riddle of existence—for himself at all events. And his comfortable happiness of mind was his just due. It was the reward of that dutiful obedience to his father in everything, which was the first and foremost duty of every good Brahmin even of every pious Hindoo. And the thought of that excellent father again stimulated the nerves of passion, a sense of the boundless goodness of everything, and the infinite wisdom of the divine providence that had contrived it all, of which the

glorious image in the shrine was a mystical embodiment of art, and parental affection, filial devotion, the sublime relations of father and son, living symbols in human society, suffused itself almost like material warmth over his whole being. Kama lay entranced. Little by little, however, something of a less transcendental sort than these feelings and fancies stirred within him, and combining with his eager desire to see his father and to express to him his own great gratitude for all the blessings he enjoyed through the instrumentality of that worthy, roused him from his day-dream and caused him to get up. In fact, he began to feel extremely hungry. Not with that craving appetite which is rather a distress than a pleasure, but with a sort of comfortable assurance, that eating would be a very great enjoyment—was in fact one of those admirable dispensations of a perfectly wise creator, for which one ought to feel particularly grateful. And yet, just as he was about to quit the shrine, something like a deep-seated forboding of, he scarce himself knew what, haunted him; he felt loath to leave the shrine, and then all at once he felt such a yearning for the seductive Nautch-girl, that he thought he could not do it, or if he did, that his feet would carry him whether he would or not to the house where she promised him (with more or less truth perhaps) that he would be always welcome. However, he mastered these feelings, he was not yet so enslaved but that healthy masculine pride came to his assistance in the struggle. Taking a last look at the wonderful blue statue with its canopy of cobra's heads none of which now menaced as they had done so mysteriously the other day in the presence of his father, Kama raised the heavy curtain, embroidered with conch-shells and peacock's feathers, passed down the vestibule, between the grotesque file of statues representing the Vishnavic Avatars and found himself under the central dome of the Mosque-temple which had been raised by the believers in a sublime monotheism to combat that very system of idolatrous symbolism and anthropomorphic religion to

which it was now devoted. As he looked up into that spacious cupola, that hovered above his head like a miniature firmament studded with its constellations of gold and silver upon a ground-work of cerulean blue, that sense of forboding and apprehension again haunted him with its subtle presence, the mind of the Mohammedan architect still spoke, even out of the desecrated architecture of the building that was its material expression, and it spoke in tones of menace. It spoke in tones of lofty warning against all the earth-made religions of Love and Hate, and against any eclectic gnosticism formed by the blending of one with the other. All were but projections of the human mind upon the dark curtain of the infinite, all were in their essence idolatrous, all ended at last in faithlessness, cruelty and unbelief. And the cruelty of a religion of Love, that was not logically consistent, was perhaps the most horrible of all. For a religion of Love always sooner or later developed into a system for enslaving its votaries through their emotions, and when once the process began, the divine thirst for freedom in the human mind in its turn began to rebel against the methods of mental jugglery upon which the system rested, hatred and opposition came into play, and at last the religion itself seized these weapons to combat its opponents and to enforce its own opinions. A religion of Love enforced by the weapons of hate and cruelty—that was the inevitable end of it all. Love and passion left to themselves in the glorious temple of liberty and the wonderworld of nature, their natural dwelling-place were sufficient to carry poor human nature over the dark spots of human consciousness, which had their origin in cruelty and bloodshed, but once let cruelty and priestcraft pinion the wings of the soul, or the ministers of a religion of Love and benevolence clutch at them in order to cram and fatten it in the hencoops and poultry-yards of the sects, and the glory of existence was on the wane, earth as we call it, that is to say human society became a hell. Something of all this Kama

himself felt dimly as he gazed into the dusky canopy of the dome, and he hurried out of the temple in order to shake off the doubts and forboding which now began to gather thickly round his comfortable optimism. But alas! as he stood beneath the infinitely grander canopy of the glorious morning-sky, those doubts and forbodings, instead of dissipating themselves as they had done in the bright hours of his virgin love, under the majestic vault of nature's incomparable temple, now gathered force and intensity, and rounded at last to that morose sense of something wanting that nothing in the whole universe could ever supply, and which before had oppressed and haunted him when he stood with Lasa in the shrine before the wondrous image of his god. Now the position of things was reversed. Then it was in the shrine that this uneasy feeling gathered force, but the vast wonderworld of nature, the unchartered heritage of all, of rich and poor alike, had power to exorcise it; now only that jewel-wrought shrine could deaden its absorbing yearning; with every step he took in the bright world of nature, the load of it increased and seemed to weigh him to the ground. And how small and narrow was that shrine of human handiwork, how vast the boundless field of nature in which his pilgrimage was cast. But yet, how beautifully the morning dawned! The marble pavement was all frosted with the dew as it had been on that glorious morning when the vision of the lovely Lasa kindled in him a new existence after his first initiation at the shrine. Soon the dew-drops would be volatilised in the blinding heat and glare of the midday sun, even now they trembled and quivered with dread and desire to be away like a bird before it takes its flight from the slender feather spray of the mimosa. But, see and listen! A little bird with a breast of heavenly blue stood upon the withering disc of a yellow lotus-blossom; the saturated petals semi-transparent and half discoloured, half sunk, half swun, water-logged under the surface beside the broad leaf-pattens of the plant. Ah! how sweetly, how piteously it

sang, that little bird, as though it would cleave the very heart of nature herself, penetrating the air, the ether and reaching at last even the subtle essence of the soul that lies enshrouded in the thick core of human selfishness and human aspiration. It sickened Kama, and yet it drew him to itself. And as he drew near, the blue bird ceased its piping, flapped its purple wings, flew into the air and vanished—and there upon the disc of the lotus-flower Kama saw the Ananda ring—that token of his faithlessness and of Lasa's ruined life, the ring he had promised to his virgin love, but had so ruthlessly transferred with all his love and faith and promises to the other less worthy object of his desires. The bamboo with the spangle dangling from it still stood in the chink of the pavement, just as the Pundit had left it on the previous night. Kama seized it and attempted to reach the ring with it; but as he touched the flower-disc with the end of it, the flower-stalk became submerged, collapsing into the water and carrying with it the flower-disc and the ring which at once fell to the bottom of the tank. As it did so, something like a sudden revelation flashed through Kama's mind, and at the same instant, whether it was an illusion of the intuitive imagination, or due to some chemical jugglery pre-devised by the Ayah Churi Puri, I cannot say, but on one of the lotus-leaves for an instant, as though they had been etched in the chlorophyll of the leaf-substance by some acid—he distinctly read the words: "I was thy sister!" Then, almost instantaneously, the whole apparition melted away like the letters of a placard that one sees for a moment by the gleam of a sudden flash of lightning. The end of the bamboo now struck against something floating in the water that resisted it. Kama raised the lotus-leaves with the end of it and there, in the glassy surface of the water, swam the ashy pale dead cold features of his virgin love. Kama hastily replaced the leaves, and a great horror fell upon him, and at the same time a sense of immense relief. Human passion dissipates itself and changes its form in the wide expanse of space.

How can I describe what he felt at the moment. At first an immeasurable sense of pity for the murdered Lasa, and of remorse at the thought that he was responsible for her death, began to fill all the chambers of his being. He felt as if the whole structure of his mental economy was collapsing like a house in a flood. But he sternly checked the torrent of emotion, otherwise he felt he should have gone mad. And hereupon his later passion resumed its power over him with overmastering force, and he yielded to it unreservedly, for he felt that in it alone lay comfort and salvation. And when he now thought of the corpse lying there in the water under the lotus-leaves, already it ceased to cause in him any sentiments of pity and remorse. After all, it was a very commonplace affair, he said to himself—this vulgar suicide. Such things happened every day, and nobody took any notice of them. He turned away with a feeling of disgust, even his beautiful lip curled into a slight sneer of contempt for the murdered girl. He said to himself it was only a piece of carrion, that corpse down below. But then, all at once, the thought occurred to him, how could she have committed suicide with the Ananda ring placed upon the lotus-flower just above her and all at once it came to him like an intuition and horrible certitude what had happened. Now he saw it all. The sign of the cobra's head in the shrine was after all a warning, an indication of what was to be. Kama, with the natural quickness of perception still further sharpened by the various passions and experiences of the last few weeks, seized the whole course of events at a single grasp. The Pundit had sacrificed his daughter in order to save his son, and to hush up the secrets of a disgraceful past. That was why he had opposed himself so strongly to Kama's virgin love-affair, that was why he had contrived that Kama should visit the Nautch at Benares, had played upon his passions and had doubtless also prepared the intrigue with the Nautch-girl, Panch Phal Ranee, and the tragic series of events which step by step had accompanied his

passion for the seductive child of liberty and desire. Kama felt a little indignant with himself at having allowed himself to be treated like a counter in a game of skill; but he felt still more indignant with the Pundit for the shameful way he had abused his, Kama's, boundless love and confidence and veneration. And this then was the religion of love and mercy, vaunted as directly revealed from heaven by the incarnate deity, vaunted as though it ranked above all other humanly devised creeds and religions, which were but the products of man's vain and idle imagination—this vulgar spiritual jugglery so it was a revelation from on high. This filthy creed of love and mercy, which ended in death and murdering and infamies without end! But then again, when Kama remembered all the love and devotion his father had shown him from the first day of his own life on earth until now, when he remembered with what patient affection his father had instructed him in all the science and theological knowledge he was himself master of, something of the old habitual veneration for the Pundit came back to him, mingled with a feeling of genuine pity and even tenderness for the old man. Doubtless he thought he had been acting for the best. Doubtless he had himself deeply suffered in sacrificing his daughter. Doubtless he had sincerely desired to spare his son any unnecessary sorrow, any painful revelation. And even his futile longing never to be a fallen angel in his son's eyes, to prevent which he had dared so much even though it was more or less the outcome of his overweening religious vanity and his desire to be considered a personage of saintly attributes, was also a pathetic tribute to the devoted affection he felt for Kama and his desire to stand well in his son's esteem. But, then, if so, if he was so desirous to keep his son from all knowledge of the guilty past how was it that he had not better concealed the corpse of the murdered Lasa, how was it that the contriver or contrivers of the deed had left (apparently deliberately) a clue to it in the Ananda ring, which had evidently been purposely placed

upon the disc of the yellow lotus-flower? That part of the tragedy could certainly not be of his father's contriving. Whose then could it be? Kama again felt that terrible forboding that haunted him as he left the shrine, but yet he could not give it any substantial form in his mind. And now, what was to be done? Should he go and tell his father what he had seen, or should he continue to treat him in the old way as though he knew and suspected nothing? At first he thought he would go. But then all at once that disgust which he had felt for the corpse of the poor murdered girl in the water transferred itself to his father Chundra Singh. He seemed to see the Pundit welcome him home to his study with a fat smile of greasy participation, and how he would teach him to chuckle and to be merry over the secret horror, while keeping it a dead letter between them, and how he would crush him down to be a part and parcel of himself and to wallow in the rank atmosphere in which he himself revelled. And then the Pundit would take his arm and converse with him, as if they were equals in age and experience and would hold up himself and his son and their relationship to the rest of the world as models of what father and son should be and as the natural outcome of his own sanctity, and all the while there would be that white corpse rotting in the water—as ground-bait for the old scoundrel's fishing-operations. Kama burst into a coarse fit of laughter, just as no doubt if he went to his father there would be a smug smile of some secret understanding between them. Something seemed to raise an invisible but insuperable barrier between him and his home, his father and his previous way of life with him. He turned away almost mechanically from the thought of it and in doing so faced about and took a few steps in the direction of the shrine.

And then again the thought of the beautiful child of Liberty and Desire, who lived but a little distance from it, came upon him with overmastering force—perhaps she was expecting him even now. He would go to her; she

would accustom him to the tragic turn things had taken, and when he had drugged himself with all she had to give would perhaps learn to be—to feel indifferent, and even the old Pundit and his half crazy hypocrisy might become supportable. At any rate, it was the pleasantest course to take, and after all pleasure was the best, the most natural guide, in this puzzling world of contradictions and conflicting emotions. He hesitated a moment longer; but in any case it was necessary to decide—to decide soon; already the sun was beating down upon him with its blinding power. He must hasten to take shelter from its rays. And then he bethought him of the vessel with the fresh hashish in it which Panch Phal Rancee had given him before—when was it? in one of the eternities of the past night of jewels; he felt for it; yes, he had it safely in the pouch. And so he went—with a sigh of relief, indeed, to think that there at all events with her the memory of the evils of this troublesome world, of its jars and discomforts, and sins and sufferings, with their attendant tragedies, would be erased and blotted out of his consciousness, at least for a while.

Meantime the Pundit grew impatient for the return of his son. Now, that the important matter that had occupied his mind for so many anxious hours had been so happily disposed of, Chundra Singh wished to reap the good results which he felt were certain to flow from it. It had been the Gordian knot in his relations with his son which had at length been satisfactorily untied; henceforth everything would run as if upon wheels. There would be that perfect solidarity of interest between father and son which was always so desirable, which was in fact indispensable where a great trust such as the blessed religion of which he was the expounder and custodian had to be handed down unimpaired from generation to generation. And then, as regards himself, his connection with Churi Puri had been now strengthened and made closer by the “elimination” as the Pundit euphemistically named the previous night’s butchery in his lucubrations; he and

the Ayah were now mutually necessary to one another, and *pari passu*, although Kama of course was never to be informed of what had happened, yet, the hidden unconsciously felt influence of the deed upon him would knit him also closer to the present object of his adoration, without his being aware of the secret spell that ever bound him closer to her side; in the respective position of father and son there would thus be a complete parity, and consequently between themselves the most perfect harmony and good understanding. Everything had been most wisely ordered for the best. Did Chundra Singh feel any sort of remorse for the hideous crime of which he had been guilty? the reader may be inclined to enquire. I am compelled to answer that he felt not the faintest vestige of any sentiment in the very least approaching remorse. On the contrary, he considered he had performed an extremely merciful and a highly meritorious act. He had quenched a life which himself had been instrumental in bringing into existence, because that life was beginning to be extremely inconvenient and mischievous in the world, at once a burden to itself and to others. As priest and parent he had a double right, and a double duty from which he was bound not to flinch; he felt that he had acquitted himself admirably. The conscious commission of a crime from religious motives has a peculiar effect upon the mind of the perpetrator of it: it seems at once to alienate him from the common run of humanity and to elevate him above it. He has tested the power of life and death, and has become one of the immortals. The barque of Chundra Singh's religious convictions had long been steering in this direction; and when the high tide of last night's important business swept him full sail into the harbour, he declared to himself with a hush of awe in the silence of his own consciousness that now at last he was in very truth a portion of the deity, and that he had become a sunnyasi, that is to say, that he had reached such a state of life-development as to be not exactly immortal but immutable, death might come, but it could

make no impression upon the adamantine rock of his present consciousness, which was destined to persist unchanged through all the fluctuations of all material things, wonderfully, miraculously, mysteriously, he had, by his right conduct, transferred himself into his own rock of ages and was no more amenable to decay and mutability; but, what he was now he would remain through all eternities of space and time. This tremendous transformation did not indeed preclude the Pundit from making a very hearty breakfast and from extracting a considerable amount of enjoyment out of his Narghili, such trifles were of course like everything else sheer illusion, but, as I have before remarked, it was sound Brahminical doctrine which taught that by way of a jest one was to consider them as real until the increasing heat rendered them less enjoyable than complete repose. And now, as the hours flew by one after the other like dust eddies across the burning deserts of Persia and Afghanistan, the deed of the past night seemed to shimmer through them like a glassy mirage which rivetted and yet eluded the eyes of his imagination. And as he gloated in memory over every circumstance and every detail of the black night's work, his own personality seemed to grow and grow in magnificence, until it became something colossal, something stupendous, while Lasa's death-agony and death-struggle dwindled down to be mere material incidents of very trifling significance, but his, *his* sacrifice of parental affection upon the altar of duty—that was indeed a sacrifice—the sacrifice of all the tenderest emotions of a loving father's heart, a supreme, a sublime renunciation of what was dearest and most precious in the world (for the Pundit's crazy vanity imputed to itself in retrospect a number of pathetic and praiseworthy sentiments, which had certainly lain perfectly dormant if indeed they had had any existence at the time when of all others they were most needed) aye, it was a deed which raised its author to the highest pinnacle of saintliness, a self-denying virtue, if it did not actually give him the right to rank himself as equal even

of the gods themselves. In this sea of self-adulation the Pundit sat—the centre of the visible and invisible universe according to his own insane phantasy, and the hours of daylight flew by, and the dusk came, without his heeding anything save that universe within the universe, its life-giving principle on which all the rest depended—himself. So immersed was he in the contemplation of his own divinity, that he had not noticed a dusky figure pass the window, nor a furtive step in the corridor outside his room, only when the door was slowly pushed open, he started from his meditations and wreathed his mouth into a sort of fat familiarity to welcome his young truant Kama—whose dilatoriness the Pundit amply excused, for he so thoroughly approved the cause of it. But the door flew open, and in the embrasure of it stood not the lovely Kama in all the grace and beauty of his awakening manhood—but, like some evil vision of the past, the menacing figure of the Ayah Churi Puri. She stood there not with the wonted obsequious compliancy of servile all-permitting passion, which lashed his own dark soul to a perfect frenzy of desire—but with the flashing eyes of a just and wrathful indignation that had gone on accumulating and repressing itself for years with patient humility and forbearance, eating its very heart out until the hour of vengeance should come, and it should body itself forth in the fiery levin of its incarnate hate. And that hour had struck at last. But the Ayah's fury was too deep, too passionate, too intense, to express itself in the language of denunciation or threats, rather it felt its way to its desire as a sleek hand glides over the soft skin of its victim, snake-like, that it may grapple and throttle the life out of him at last by inches. "Ever glorious incarnation of the Blessed Vishnu himself", she began, bowing herself with a mock reverence, which the Pundit's crazy vanity and the gathering darkness precluded him from perceiving was assumed, "I have come to do homage to the last and mightiest Avatar of the Blessed One, that tremendous incarnation destined with its effulgence to ir-

radiate all the worlds of matter and to penetrate with its two-edged lightning sword even the deepest abysses of the abode of Yama."

The Pundit felt at these words that from the height of his suddenly revealed divinity he ought to stoop in order to say something gracious and godlike to the poor Ayah; indeed, having soared to such tremendous heights, he even began to feel it was a little beneath his dignity to condescend to those sentiments he had previously entertained for the Ayah Churi Puri. But his egregious vanity literally choked the words; they died away in his throat in a sort of gurgle of insane self-adulation. And the Ayah continued:—"Above the bones of fallen kings, the chariot of the conqueror wings its way to the throne of glory, above the skeletons of ruined lives and wasted hopes, the men, mighty in wisdom and sanctity and holiness, soar inaccessible like the eagles of the Himalayas. The skeleton of a ruined life—nay, of ruined lives—I lay before thine altar-throne, oh mighty, oh incarnate Vishnu, I dust of the dust of earth, drought of water, mere breathlessness of the whirlwind and nothingness of nothingness, in the impotence of my weakness, glorying in the sacrifice, even though it add but the minutest shimmer to the aureole of thy godhead." These high flown phrases were too much in accordance with what the Pundit had at last convinced himself was the supreme fact, the verity of verities that transcended everything else, material and immaterial, visible and invisible for him to fail to greet them with a warm approval; he nodded his head up and down several times with a gesture of what he considered regal—semi-divine dignity. The Ayah continued as follows:—"Yes, the skeletons of ruined lives I lay before thine altar-throne, oh great one—first the skeleton of my own ruined life—blasted to be what it has been by the honey of thy heaven-inspired words of sweetness—when the heart of my beloved that would have been my husband was broken by the faithlessness to which you seduced me—oh! what a revelation from on high it was

to feel that my broken crippled life of mangled love and arid promises that never were fulfilled, was the sure foundation of thy system, thy power, thy authority, out of which they grew and flourished until now they cover the whole world like the spreading foliage of a sacred Banyan-tree. Trample the shattered vertebræ of my broken disintegrated past under your sacred feet, it is the earnest of my supreme reward in heaven; and oh! with what exquisite, what divine wisdom do you contrive and order everything. The skeleton of yet another ruined life erects itself between earth and heaven that thy transfigured feet may mount its macerated ribs. Like an infinite series of rungs of a ladder whose foot rests upon the earth they stretch away to distances beyond the mind of man to contemplate that thy feet may ascend them, may traverse the infinities, may scale the heights of the absolute. All around, far into the infinities of the night-heaven, a chalky phosphorescence projects itself, enshrouds thee in thy passage beyond the stars, is the nimbus of thy saintliness, the bright effulgence of thy divinity. And below there in the sweltering waters of the tank that seethes in the midday sun, ever present like the present, is the corpse of the child-life from whose decay and premature corruption that phosphorescent pathway to the stars is bodied forth, along which thy triumphant journey leads, swathed in the iridescence of its ghostly glamour, shrouded in the mystery of its sheeted death. Oh! most mighty, oh! most glorious Avatar of Vishnu, ever Blessed God of Love and Mercy", continued the Ayah with just the faintest touch of sarcasm in her voice and a scarcely perceptible tremor in it as she crept nearer to the supreme moment of her long contemplated vengeance, "the skeleton of yet another ruined life strews the pathway of thy triumph to thy throne of glory and apotheosis, but the bones of it are yet vital, they crawl and writhe animated by the galvanic pulses of an artificial life, prone disjointed, detached they bestrew the earth and knuckle to their jiggling dance of death in

isolated morsels, phalanges, ankle bones and skulls that flop, and quiver and knack together like a haul of fish flung out upon the strand to die. Listen! It is the dawning manhood of thy best beloved son, that welters on the slimy slack tide of infamy and of all uncleanness, that the triumphant galley of thy victorious godhead may glass itself upon the festering ooze and sun itself in the polished corruption of a viscid ocean, in whose tabid waves the healthy life of freedom and of nature sickening dies, and dying lives in the gangrened licence and foul perpetual orgy of thy magnanimous paternity, thy paternal divinity, thy self-ordained providence of juggling love and pestilent intrigue, thy order which is but an inventory of chaos, thy discipline which is but the rythmical activity of fiends in hell. Listen! last night and this morning thy best-beloved son is dallying in the arms of her who is the shameful offspring of mine and thine embraces in the jovial hours of our guilty past. Once the horror has already been, to-night it will be again; perhaps now is. My revenge is perfected. Thy nemesis complete. What was to be, has been. The doom is irreversible. The dreadful deed accomplished. Now hug thyself in thy self-esteem, thou loathsome minion of an impure creed, glory in the heaven-lit perspicacity which brought about the very shame, its base intrigues and plotting cruelties were designed to exclude; sun thyself, great lord of universe, in the beamy splendour of thy shadowy vitiated past, which has hung above thee its veil of thick miasma folds and blinded thee; chuckle at the shrewdness of thy faithless creed of love whose bungling wits have slaughtered innocence and crowned its rival death-in-life, that the sanctity of thy pompous pride might never be brought to the test, that the powers of thy botched-up masquerade of virtue-vice might still hobble round in uncontested majesty, that the arrogance of thy self-assumed authority and thy paternal jurisdiction might still pervert and brutalise the fresh and natural vitality of future generations and kill the dawning hopes of truth and liberty."

So spoke the Ayah in words of flame, and through the gathering darkness the whites of her deep-set lozenge-eyes flickered an instant like a shimmer of white horses. And that shimmer seemed to waver through the darkness and to light upon the flabby belated features of the self-canonised Pundit, smiting them as if with a chalky blight. He tried to speak, but no words came, though his tongue clacked feebly against his thick parted lips, and his hand moved through a small arc of that swoop of dogmatic certainty to which attention has more than once been drawn as so characteristic of the priestly caste. The motion went on, repeated itself automatically like the movement of the head of one of those porcelain-figures of chinese mandarins which are frequently placed in the halls or vestibules of the houses of the great. At last, when the Pundit had sufficiently recovered himself to endeavour to speak, he looked up, but the Ayah Churi Puri had vanished. Chundra Singh sat there and goggled in a paroxysm of inarticulate rage to think that he, who had imagined himself to be the protagonist of the piece, the moving spirit of its action, shifting the other characters to and fro as though they had been counters in a game, had been in reality the dupe of one of his own creatures, at once the instrument in her long-planned scheme of vengeance and the object of it. Hoaxed into a shameful and compromising murder which had precipitated and had been plotted by the ruthless vengeance of the Ayah to precipitate the very horror he had hoped thereby to render for ever impossible, exposed as doubtless he would be exposed, to the loathing and contempt of his son, and sooner or later of his devotees, hurled from the pedestal of sanctity on which his self-presumption had tempted him in a fatal hour to mount, the Pundit a first cast about him in vain for any spot of firm ground upon which to reconstruct the shattered edifice of his religious pride. It sickened him now—the thought of that disgusting butchery and the burlesque and vile part he had played in it with so light a heart—that butchery of the innocent child-life,

in all its virgin loveliness and stainless purity, which would have made a paradise of Kama's young existence and have been the joy and comfort of his own declining years. It maddened him now to think of that fairy sylph-like being, the very embodiment of all that was lovely and cheering and divine in nature, done to death by his own cruel and misguided hand. And now it was all irrevocable. Destiny—that self-played game of chess deep down in the very depths of all things of which our paltry life on earth was but the mere shadow of a shadow, the whiff and wind of the pieces as they moved upon their invisible chess-board in the very heart of things,—destiny, in spite of all his well-planned schemes, had been even with him and had smitten him to the ground at last; yet even here, one thought somewhat rehabilitated his crest-fallen religious vanity and paved the way to a fresh crop of illusions and self-deceptions. After all, he said to himself, the hatred of the Ayah and her long-studied scheme of vengeance were the outcome of his own action. True, of what perhaps some people might consider a somewhat equivocal sort of action in the past. But what of that? Both his past and present were the resultant of his own hereditary Vaishnavic-formed character, and of the sublime religion of which he was the hereditary trustee; then, let chaos come; persecution, discredit, shame,—all would be only a profounder revelation of the essential truths of the creed he professed, brought about by the operation of his own inspired personality, miraculously guided by an all merciful providence. "Yes, it is all me", said the Pundit to himself pathetically and shaking his head over the new aspect of the great mystery, "I have brought it all about, or rather Vishnu through my instrumentality, the Blessed One reveals himself in myriads of different ways."

And little by little this train of reflections reinstated the Pundit in his own self-esteem, so that, terrible as this new Vaishnavic manifestation did indeed appear, he managed to steady himself, as it were, in the middle of

the dreadful hurly-burly and appear self-contained and self-composed like the routine of court etiquette in the midst of an expiring æon. And this comparison is not an inapt one, for there was a perfunctoriness and formality from first to last in everything the Pundit said and did. But the shock had left him for the present at all events without any power of initiative, he sat on his divan in a half dazed state, incapable of any sort of studious work, only his hand sawed mechanically up and down, and his thick lips parted from time to time, as if about to speak. But no words came, for the thought behind it all was smashed into the glary phosphorescence of a Gorgon-dream. So he sat and mused and ruminated, like a self-petrifying spring, like a ghastly Medusa that turned itself to stone.

Meantime, the Ayah had skirted the broken wall which surrounded the precincts of the temple and its colonnades. As on a previous night, she unrobed herself and rolled the flame-coloured mantle under her arm that it might not attract attention, but the hour was now drawing towards midnight; the toiling millions of that hot overpopulated land, were asleep or absorbed over their work in close out of the way workshops. No one was stirring abroad, not even a stray member of the sacred brotherhood of the Thugs, whose creed of murder was perhaps the truest and most merciful one for an ancient country like Hindustan with its teeming millions of frail, feebly organised bodies animated by the hate and treachery of all feeble organisations, whether political or individual. Unless, indeed, the Ayah may be considered one of the sacred confraternity. However this may be, she rapidly passed the dusky cupolas of the Mosque and its Vishnu-shrine, scarcely, even, deigning to give a glance at the three cloud-like domes standing out against the star-inwoven sky like three gigantic, dusky pearls, which might perhaps have represented to a Hindoo-mind those three states or eternities of consciousness which hang suspended for ever in mind space, threaded as it were, upon the infinite

extension of the It—the Impersonality—the Brahm. She hurried on until she arrived at a small, but elegantly built wooden bungalow not many minutes walk beyond the shrine. Here she resumed her tawny-orange robe, went to the back of the building and there crouched or squatted on her haunches for a considerable length of time, lost in meditation. Then she rose to her feet and, according to her invariable custom, addressed a prayer to the particular form of deity she worshipped—most likely some Saivic personality or other. Then she sat down again and listened. Yes, there were those same strange cries of mingled delight and agony that on the night before had almost startled Lasa from her fatal trance under the colonnades. It was Kama and her daughter who again revelled in their hashish orgy. The Ayah smiled furtively as she groped about for something under the Tamarind-bushes, and a strange expression of mingled tenderness, compassion and hatred glittered in her deep-set steely eyes. Then her heart began to throb wildly as it had done more than thirty years before at the first moment of her virgin-love for the handsome fisher-boy whom her faithlessness had killed. It came back to her in the dark starry night of her age, that throbbing glory of love's first delight, that wove itself with the sunlight and was itself heaven and existence, life and death, soul and matter, in itself neither time—eternity nor annihilation, but the ever deepening unity of an eternal present. There was a sound in the darkness like a stifled sob and then the rending of floss-silk,—she had struck a light and lo! a flaming torch was in her hand. Then in an instant all the tigress leapt up in her. She ran to the bungalow and laid the torch under the light framework of the building, wherever there was a chink or crevice or wherever the rats had excavated the earth, or it had sunk or been carried away by the water of the previous thunderstorm, or for any other cause had given way or been hollowed out. In a very few minutes the bungalow was a sheet of flame. Then she stole round to the front of

the house. But just as she had posted herself near the front of the verandah to enjoy the spectacle of her handiwork, Kama rushed from the building, his white Brahmin's robe with its broad hem of crimson flying behind him, a mass of flames. He tore it off and trampled it under foot to extinguish it, and then stood transfixed, like the naked statue of some Antinous, the horrible awful terror of the hashish madness staring out of his glassy eyes. He stood there face to face with that tawny figure of an inexorable, pitiless destiny, with her torch of vengeance still blazing in her ruthless hand, like a last embodiment of the fabled Erynnyes of the Grecian wonder-world. "Oh! heart of my Aiula, that broke for me, heart of my heart, that livest for ever here", (and she smote herself upon the breast) "now art thou avenged, through all eternities; now art thou one with me for ever. And thou false-hearted youth, who hadst better have perished in thy burning rat-hole of insane, incestuous passion", she exclaimed, turning to Kama, whose brain, already on fire with the flames of hell, kindled in a yet fiercer conflagration of gloomy dread and heart sickening terror when confronted with the frightful passion of the Ayah: "go, save thine abject traitor's skin or better hurl thyself beneath yon swaying roof-tree and wed in death the burning brands that roar and crackle round thy sister's couch of "infamy". Kama in his hashish delirium only half understood what the Ayah meant, but her words intensified the awful hell in which his soul rocked and tumbled like a burning ship in a storm. And the Ayah continued:—"Yes, the life of innocence thou flungest with such disdainful levity to feed thy father's fish-pond—oh! Aiula, my beloved, now art thou avenged—the child-life that was butchered at the bloody shrine of parental duty, social order, obedience, discipline, all the hideous rout of prim conventionalities, dangling their rancid baits of festering lusts bred in the carcase of a disintegrating age to shame the fools of virtue—the child-life that linked with thine had been a perfect paradise on earth—Lasa,

daughter of a highborn Feringhee, thou mightest have wedded blamelessly—she was no relation to thyself; but in the insanity of thy filial duty, in its deepest essence only the instinct of an animalism that reverts towards a carrion past at the bidding of vile authority, thou didst let the child-life perish within thee, that thou mightest conform to the drilled corruption of thy social hell; and lo! thy fate—to batten above the murdered corpse of nature's purity and nature's innocence, faithless and blinded in all thy love—the first and the last—knowing nothing of what it had most imported thee to know while seeming to know everything, for hadst thou known, thou hadst not linked thyself with her who is the offspring of mine and thy father's shame—thou hadst not been what now thou art—the paramour of thy—" The Ayah's words, and more perhaps the concentrated fury which lurked behind them and drove them against his heart like a rain of poisoned arrows, had now partially sobered Kama, so far, at all events, that the hell which had been previously raging within him void, formless and infinite, now took on a clotted shape and clothed itself in the forms and semblances of earthly feelings and objects. He grasped and realised what the Ayah had said sufficiently, to be what we call conscious of the horror of his state. "Speak not the word, accursed that thou art", he cried, smiting his fore-head, and with a shriek of horror that seemed to rend the very breeze in twain, flung himself upon the Ayah, tore the still flaming torch out of her hand and then stood a moment as if uncertain what to do next. "And now, what wilt thou do with thyself", cried the Ayah with a bitter sneer, "thou who sousest virtue and roastest infamy, what spit is hot enough for thine own vile carcase?" Kama made no reply: he still stood irresolute, with the torch drooping slantwise in his uncertain fingers, and the smoky flame lighting up his features with a fitful and ruddy glare. For a moment the idea occurred to him that he would fire his own wretched body, but all his young vitality rebelled against the idea of self-destruc-

tion, and this repugnance manifested itself in a paroxysm of fear, a dread and horror, as of some instrument of destiny, of the torch he held in his hand which, however, a mysterious influence prevented him from letting go. Blinded by the intensity of this fear, he had almost leapt into the flames of the burning bungalow, when suddenly an idea seized him partly prompted perhaps by the influence of the hashish-drug, one of the effects of which in certain temperaments is to excite and stimulate a furious mania for destroying everything. He looked, and his eyes encountered the three dusky domes of the Mosque-temple sharply delineated against the glimmering whiteness of the western sky, where the setting moon had just sunk behind the colonnades that fronted his own home, leaving a shimmer as of white horses in the dying leper-stricken sky. And his thoughts all at once turned to the shrine and to the temple where the horror had first been, and to the shameful creed of easy-going Love and Mercy out of which it had all grown, and he began to loath the false and treacherous creed and the sculptured symbolism which was at once the origin and the outcome of it all. Holding the torch high above his brows, he leapt across the low cactus-hedge which separated the garden of the bungalow from the road, and tore along the vaguely delineated stretch of dusky whiteness like some Orestes pursued by the Eumenides of Grecian fable. Like Orestes he too sought refuge in a temple from the hell of evil thoughts that seethed within his brain, but from very different motives and with very different intentions from those of the hero of the great tragedians. Arrived at the temple, he hurried to the back of the shrine and hastily unlocked the door of the chantry or vestry which has been described above on a previous occasion. Then he pushed impatiently against the solid woodwork. The door yielded to his weight, and in another minute he found himself within the sancturay with the pine torch flaming above his head. For a moment he stood half awed and irresolute before the couch of Vishnu, so sublimely ma-

jestic was the image of the god which he had hastened thither to destroy. He turned his head away, he looked upward to avoid meeting the wedge-shaped irids of the statue lest they should cause him to falter, perhaps even constrain him to desist altogether from his work of vengeance. But above, in the flickering light of the torch, the canopy of the cobra's heads with their pick-axe-like fangs seemed to strike and menace, and their jewelled eyes to flash and burn like red hot coals, as though behind them lurked a host of spiritual ministers of destruction, ready at an instant's notice to avenge the slightest injury to the god they were commissioned to protect, and still higher above his head, gleaming steadily as though it were the soul of the tranquil god who lay below on the couch of aventurine in that still eternal love-trance, Kama saw the red eye of the lamp that was never allowed to extinguish, which seemed to eye him keenly like a falcon and to say: 'I see it all. I saw it all. I shall see it all. I shine. I am extinguished. I am rekindled. I shine in other worlds, in other hemispheres. Do according to your heart's desire'. Kama grasped the torch tighter in his hand and was about to fulfill what seemed to be his destiny when again, in spite of himself, his eyes fell upon the marvellous statue of the god, in its sublime repose, and the wedge-shaped irids, that had always exercised such a mysterious, such an indescribable influence over him, now gazed at him with a look of reproach, almost of entreaty, as though they would have said: 'Was it our doing, was it not thine own free act?' Kama was beginning to relent, he sloped the torch which now burned sluggishly at his side, and had almost decided to quit the temple and leave the magical image of the god unscathed, when all at once, as if by a fatality, his eye fell on the ring and the lotus in two of the hands of Vishnu. The ring swum in the mirky, smoke-charged atmosphere, and in the shifting shadows almost made it appear as though the hand that held it jerked it triumphantly to and fro as if in mockery of Kama, as if it dared him to carry out

the promptings of his mad remorse. And then he looked at the lotus-flower in the other hand, and the ruddy uncertain light made it too appear as though it were blood-stained and as though it were half deflowered. It too reminded him of the too early deflowered corpse that weltered in the tank outside, and of all that might have been, and he took new courage and new resolution. And then, as he looked at the other lotus with the four-headed opal Brahm that emerged on its curving flower-stalk from the supple body of the god, another order of thoughts assailed him, for it brought back to him the orgy of the infamy that had ministered to its insane pleasures. But, perhaps, owing to some law of association of ideas the hashish-tremor has the singular property of being reinduced, and its passion surges repropagated in some cases long after the period when the drug was first taken or administered and at a time when the mind of the person who took it is in full activity and possesses all its normal faculties—by some apparently perfectly indifferent object which may happen to strike the eye. It is not wonderful, therefore, that in Kama, who had scarcely recovered from his first and was yet under the influence of his second hashish orgy, this mysterious object should have had a sudden and overmastering effect. He felt at an instant that his whole being was being again invaded, reabsorbed by the cloying frenzy of indescribable delight in which thought and feeling, conscience, everything had collapsed the night before in a ravished dream of the senses and the imagination. It was the crisis of his and the temple's fate. Should he yield himself to its Siren music or should he shake it off and act. He hardly reasoned consciously. On occasions like these some very trifling thing generally turns the scale. He had almost yielded with a thrill of enthusiastic forgiveness that embraced under its ample shield his father, the Ayah, Panch Phal Rane, even the murder of Lasa, and his present state of twofold widowhood, and cheated hopes, and illusions, when the rapidly consuming torch began to scorch his side and made

him realise that in a very few minutes it would no longer be in his power to decide, the torch would be extinguished and circumstance would have forever vetoed the possibility of atonement and revenge. Again his eyes caught the wedge-shaped irids of the god, and this time they seemed to Kama to have in them a look of cynical and malignant triumph, as though the god again dared him to do what he had come to do, as though they said in effect: 'The fatality of Vishnu is before all worlds, what art thou and thy puny will before him but as motes in the crucible that fuse themselves in the passion of his being! The instinct of opposition to the inevitable, which we all feel at times, now spoke in Kama: 'The inevitable shall not be the inevitable' it seemed to say defiantly, for a moment the answer to it came in a feeble whisper of consciousness, 'the thing thou doest whatever it is will be that which was to be—the inevitable, thy seeming choice is only another link in the never ending chain of cause and effect.' "Away, vile sophistries", Kama exclaimed, as one of the destruction prompting hashish thrills quivered at his heart and sent its surges of intensified feeling one after the other through brain and nerve. And in a spasm of destructive energy he tore down some of the hangings and tapestries of the shrine and heaped them before the couch of aventurine and the blue marble image of the god. Just as he had lighted this scanty fuel the torch expired in his hands, he had to cherish the fire, feeding it with the fragments of tapistry and paper work which he had torn and collected together. Even now it would most likely have smouldered out and left the shrine and the statue uninjured when a sudden thought struck him. He passed hastily out beyond the curtain which separated the shrine from the vestibule in which stood ranged along the walls the grotesque statuary that represented the eight principal Avatars of the second person of the Hindoo Trinity. Here were a number of worm eaten benches and prie-dieux on which the congregation sat at the monthly celebrations in honour of the god. He tore

away some of the half rotten woodwork and hastily returned with it into the shrine. The smouldering fragments of tapestry hardly glimmered, but there was just enough heat and flame among them to kindle a splinter of the rotten woodwork. It had no sooner taken hold than the fire in the charred tapestries expired. This time, however, the nascent fire required less nursing than before. The dry rotten wood soon began to blaze and crackle, Kama piled it all in a heap before the couch of Vishnu and hastily went and brought more of it from the vestibule, and now the high narrow walls of the shrine converging towards the small lancet-window above acted like the shaft of a chimney and drew the flames upwards. Anything that was combustible on the walls took fire and burned in red patches like a skin eruption. Then the heat cracked the oil receptacles of the lamps that hung above the statue forming a kind of second canopy over it. The oil poured down and ran along the floor to the curtain of embroidered conch-shells and peacock feathers that hung between the shrine and the vestibule. The heat was beginning to be unbearable. Kama hurried through the vestibule and stood nearly under the central dome of the Mosque-temple. Little by little the flames ran up the middle of the curtain cleaving it in two. As the flames spread rapidly, the triangular interspace between the two halves of the curtain widened, and fiery icicles of flames fringed the rapidly consuming margins which seemed as though they were being rolled back by some invisible hand of destiny. At last, the whole interior of the shrine was exposed to view like a gigantic furnace. The fire rushed upward in huge spires and eddies of smoke and flame in which the half molten plates of gold which covered the walls of the shrine glowed and quivered, giving the conflagration the appearance of vast extent as though it was space itself that burnt itself away, and as the plates of gold alternately contracted and expanded, the jewels and precious stones set in them split and flew in all directions like diverse coloured meteors,

reminding Kama of the display of rockets and stars of artificial fire he had witnessed before the Nautch at the ceremonies in the garden of Mohun Lal. And in the centre of it all as if it were his funeral pyre, reposed the majestic statue of Vishnu with the canopy of serpent's heads above him, and the four symbols of his divinity in his four hands, the conch, the hammer, the ring and the lotus, which appeared and disappeared from time to time in the sheet of roaring fire. But still the hard blue marble of the wondrous statue resisted the heat as though it were formed of some indestructible kind of mineral and as the heat grew intenser the very body of the god seemed to grow transparent to become etherialized, to be volatilised, as though that master-piece of human handiwork was actually being fused and apotheosized into the spiritualised body of some living present deity waiting to enter into it. And more in the fore-ground, as the shadows danced to and fro, the grotesque statues representing the eight Vaishnavic avatars seemed to wreath themselves into a thousand grotesque attitudes. The tortoise avatar seemed to crawl and carry to and fro the swaying figure that stood upon its back. The dragon figure seemed to flap its tail, the dwarf to wave its tiny arms, the boar to rout with snout and tusks, and the man lion to gnash his teeth and tear wider open the body of the human victim that lay upon his lap. And then all at once an immense body of flame rushed from the shrine into the vestibule and compelled Kama to draw back and stand more directly under the central dome of the Mosque-temple. For a moment the statue of Vishnu flashed out white hot among the devouring flames, endued as it were with a kind of dying life; the eyes in the eleven cobra's heads flashed and quivered, the jaws shut and opened, the pick-axe-like fangs struck at some imaginary enemy in a futile attempt to save the idol above which they watched. And in the eddying vortices of fire the four hands of the god also shook and whirled; the lotus-flower expanded, the hammer smote, the ring revolved and the conch-shell

glowed pink like the heart of the sunset. Then all at once the beryl lotus with the four-headed figure of Brahm began to sway to and fro upon its curving flower-stalk that issued from the supple and now transparent body of the god, and suddenly burst with a loud explosion as a globe-like mass of fire filled the whole body of the vestibule and cut off all further view of the shrine and of its mysteries. The flames now rapidly seized upon all parts of the temple, which was in great measure constructed of wood and burnt like tinder. Kama was driven by the heat to the western end of the building and made his escape through one of the horse-shoe-shaped portals. It was fully time he did so. A very few minutes after he had quitted the temple the three domes were suffused with a deep pink colour, the reflection of the fire which was inside rapidly devouring everything combustible. They stood out against the star-spangled sky like blood red suns rising above a sea of lurid vapours and endowed with a sort of transient life, perishing in the very heat that lent it a momentary semblance of existence. Very soon the flames had eaten through the thin shells of the three cupolas consisting of wood and plaster, and ruddy tongues of fire leapt out of them in all directions launching themselves into the darkness of the night-heaven like the sun's corona in a total eclipse. And now, once that the fire had won a way through its prison-house and revelled in the glorious freedom of the fresh night-air, the ultimate fate of the whole building was no longer doubtful, while the sudden roaring of the flames as joist and architrave collapsed and fell on to the burning floor below, warned Kama that all was practically over and that he had not a moment to loose if he wished to get away before the village was aroused and the people came to do what they could to save their temple from destruction. If they found him there in his present condition, their suspicions would be infallibly aroused, and if once he was conjectured to be the author of the sacrilege his life would not be worth a minutes purchase. He there-

fore made the best of his way to the southern portion of the colonnades, passed through one of the gaps in the ruined wall which girdled the precincts of the Mosque and tank, and after traversing a tract of barren ground lying southward of the village and temple of Poojerabad directed his steps westwards toward the jungle. Once or twice, as with flying feet he hurried on faster and faster through the darkness, he turned and cast a hasty glance at the burning building. Some of the minarets had already fallen, others were oscillating to and fro as if in earthquake. Everywhere the flames were taking hold with fatal rapidity and the roaring and crackling increased every minute in violence. But even through the roar and crackle of the flames Kama now thought he could distinguish the hurried tramp of feet as though people from the village gathered to the fatal spot—yes, and hark! that was assuredly a cry of dismay and indignation hurled into the night-air as they perceived how impotent they were to save the building from the fate which menaced it. Now that he was some distance away and on the opposite side of the burning temple, the glare of the conflagration protected him from being observed and he paused once or twice to contemplate his handiwork. Once or twice indeed he felt a qualm of regret as he thought of those glorious cloud-like cupolas flashing ruddy with their dying gleam of life as though it had been the eternity of the inorganic that clothes itself a brief instant in the agony of earthly life. Those domes and fretted arches of the Moslem Mosque had been symbols of a sublimer faith than the creed in which he had been brought up, they were blameless, they were silent protests against the idolatry of his age and country. Was it well that they had been destroyed? A momentary feeling of remorse filled his mind of regret for their vanished splendour, then he reflected that they had been desecrated for many ages and been too long linked with the hateful idolatry of the religion of Love and Mercy to be of any use in furthering a purer religion now. When

the shrine of Vishnu and its idol and its mystic symbolism had once been pieced on to the Mosque-temple the whole became a self-contradiction, an antithesis, a dualism like the false decaying society out of which it sprang and of which it was an emblem. Better, far better, that it should perish out of hand and not a trace remain of its desecrated aisles. And perhaps Kama was right, and perhaps even the architect of the sublime structure himself, if he could have been consulted, would also have preferred that the temple he had planned, when once it had been polluted and turned to vile uses, should be levelled to the dust and not one stone of it left upon another.

Just as these thoughts crowded Kama's mind, as if the course of the conflagration had shaped the course of them in his brain, the three cupolas collapsed with a terrific crash and a forest of sparks and corruscating flames rushed into the spangled night for a moment blotting out the stars; like a last attempt of the roaring abyss of matter to scale the height of heaven. But very soon the stars stole out again, and Kama at first welcomed them for their calm and soothing light until he remembered that they too were but burning temples of a larger mould, flinging the fury of their abysmal matter into the nothingness of space, and he sickened to feel himself trapped and shut in by that never ending purposeless mutability and no escape anywhere. At last, the light of the conflagration began visibly to decline, until finally only the red hot walls and smouldering rafters threw up a beam of blood red light into the sky, staining the colonnades, the foliage and the space around them with the same colour. And step by step the light still further declined as the rafters charred and mouldered and fell in, so that you might have imagined it was a representation in miniature of a world's collapse and the extinction of its sun's heat and light on which all its organic life depended. Kama had by this time reached the outskirts of the jungle and followed haphazard a narrow pathway that led through the tangle of palms and climbing bamboo-stalks.

And yet as he continued to follow it, the pathway seemed purposely to be guiding him towards some fixed goal, and a voice seemed to whisper in his ear: 'in the ashes of destruction shall thy soul find repose'. He also fancied he saw fragments of leaves and sticks dropped here and there in places where the path bifurcated as if put there purposely to show him which way to take. However this may be, he continued to press rapidly onward among tracts of jungle that at every step became wilder and more lonely, more destitute of the trace of any living thing, save when the roar of a distant tiger woke the solitary echoes. At last the pathway began to widen, and Kama now reached a small clearing at the opposite side of which was a shrine or diminutive temple built of a kind of red earth, with two wooden pillars in front of it supporting a pediment or broad gable roughly hewn out of the same material. As he drew nearer to this erection he perceived that the interior of the shrine was painted black and that a small black idol of Siva was seated on the altar. The low fore-head, wide mouth and large oblique almond-shaped eyes with their small staring irids gave to the figure, which was cast in bronze and burnt or painted black, a peculiarly cruel and inhuman appearance. On the lintels of the entrance and about the altar were splashes of the blood, probably for the most part of goats, but not impossibly also of human infants. In the middle of the floor stood an upright black stone representing the sacred linga of Siva. Outside the shrine, leaning against one of the wooden pillars, sat a horrible looking faquir. His whole body which was naked except for a filthy loin-cloth was smeared with some substance of a blood red colour. His head was overgrown with an immense mass of fuzzy grey hair like the fleece of an unwashed sheep, and a frizzly grey beard hung down to his waist from the lower part of his face. His nose was large and aquiline, his eyes so deeply sunk under the furrowed brows as to be almost invisible. The skin of his face was a dirty yellow colour in some places

stretched over raised patches, in other ones hollow pitted depressions but was everywhere of the same dull opaque texture. He sat there perfectly motionless but, as Kama approached the shrine, drawled out in a thin wiry unsympathetic voice, as though he were an ingeniously contrived automaton that spoke by means of clockwork, the words:—"In the ashes of destruction shall thy soul find repose." Kama started at this strange human echo of his own inmost thought and stared in amazement at the faquir. As he did so he observed that one of his knotty emaciated fingers stuck out at an angle from his hand and pointed to the other wooden pillar before which stood a gallipot containing the remains of some charred bones, and beside it was a large hollow gourd with a hole in it to receive the offerings of the faithful. Kama almost mechanically, and without well knowing what he did, for the hashish was still acting fitfully and intermittently upon his nervous system, went to the gallipot, took out some of the grey ashes and erasing the horse-shoe-shaped symbols of his Vaishnavic creed traced there instead the three horizontal ashen grey lines which distinguish the votaries of Siva. As he did so the faquir rose and beckoned him to follow him to the back of the shrine. Here the mystic opened a trap-door in the ground took out various articles of disguise and gave them to Kama; perhaps other rites were performed which the darkness of the foliage precluded me from observing. Then the faquir and Kama reappeared before the shrine, and Kama placed three bilva-leaves before the linga, walked round it seven times and sprinkled it with water from a small copper ewer which the faquir had given him for the purpose. As he issued from the interior of the shrine the faquir was standing by his pillar and the disjointed finger pointed in the direction of a small path leading towards the back of the shrine:—"Westward in the tract of the setting sun and of the dying day which is the soul of Siva", muttered the faquir, "and to the western death in life", while speaking these words he had seated himself

again, and again drawled in the same thin dry, wiry, unsympathetic voice the words:—"In the ashes of destruction shall thy soul find repose."

Kama waited no longer by the ghastly shrine with its shocking guardian, but pursued his way among the thick jungle until after walking some miles, he came upon a road which followed the same direction as the pathway from the wood, and shrine. Along this road he begged his way as a mendicant faquir for many days. He travelled mostly after sunset, of course on foot, and in these flaming nights of southern skies with their myriads of constellations he seemed to see again a stupendous repetition of the burning temple flinging its sparks high into the air as if from the abyss of matter. And when the sun rose and set, an orb of ruddy light, it reminded him of the blazing cupolas of the temple in their brief flash of dying life before they collapsed and perished and were no more. And when everything reeled in the frenzy of the midday heat and he rested reclining under the shade of a spreading fig-tree, an apparition of the wondrous image of the God of Love and Mercy seemed to be bodied forth out of the trance-like fiery silence of the midday heat, it lay there the same as ever in the repose of its eternal love-trance, only that a smile as of secret triumph seemed to lurk within the dreaming eyes, the hoods of the cobras dilated as they struck with their pick-axe-like fangs, and the ring revolved and the conch-shell glowed in the supple fingers of the god. Then Kama felt glad in his heart that the dualism of the Mosquetemple was at an end for ever, and when the coolness of the evening came again after the sun had set and before the stars shone out, in uncertain glimpses came to him the conception of a creed that should be neither one of Love or Hate, with their cruel and insane thirst for bloodshed and repression, but a religion of truth and freedom and nature which should satisfy all the Passions and Desires and Aspirations of Humanity, because it should be above them all. At last he reached the western

shore of Hindustan and then the young faquir mysteriously vanished. India knew him no more. At Poojerabad his fate was a source of many fruitless speculations, the general belief, however, was that he had perished in the burning temple he had so sacrilegiously desecrated and then destroyed. Doubtless he would expiate his awful crime in a practically interminable series of infernal incarnations. Some, nowever, took a more charitable view and maintained that he met his death in endeavouring to save the temple which had been fired by the Ayah. In this case, of course he was a demi-god and ought to be worshipped as such. In this dilemma as to how his memory should be cherished, whether with execrations or as that of a heroic and martyred saint, the wisest course to adopt seemed to be to say nothing about his fate, and thus, before very long, he completely dropped out of public recollection.

What became of the Ayah and her daughter Panch Phal Ranee? That is a question to which it is difficult to give a decisive answer. Whether the ballet-girl perished in the burning bungalow or escaped unhurt or dragged out a miserable existence of crippled deformity, is not exactly clear. It is said, however, that in the neighbourhood of Travancore, in southern India, a new form of Thaumaturgic Saivism, in which Siva and his wife Parvati were worshipped and propitiated through the medium of a stern and rigid system of morality, made its appearance about this time. It was propagated by a striking Dravidian woman some fifty years of age and her daughter, a young girl of surpassing loveliness. Whether this was the Ayah Churi Puri and her daughter Rarde Lal, must be left to the judicious reader to decide.

And the Pundit? Let us see how he spent the eventful night of the burning of the shrine and temple of Vishnu. His study it must be remembered faced west, that is to say, away from the tank and the colonnades; overcome by the shock of the previous evening he had fallen into a deep apoplectic

sleep. At first the people who had gathered to attempt to save the burning temple were too much occupied and too much bewildered by the suddenness of the catastrophe, to think at all of the place's nominal custodian. When at length some did go to summon him, they found him in such a deep and death-like slumber that it was impossible to awake him. As he could have been of no possible sort of use in their attempts to extinguish the fire they let him be. He woke in the morning, however, of his own accord, and then his servants told him what had happened. He received the account with remarkable apathy, observing with a touch of his old dogmatic certainty:—"It is part of an eternal process. Vishnu is very great, aye, even in self-dissolution." But when he waddled out of his verandah into the colonnades a scene of desolation met him everywhere. The intense heat from the burning temple had shattered the marble pavement at the east end of the sacred enclosure causing the ground to crack in large fissures through which the water of the tank had run off and left a mass of slime and tangled lotus-roots half covered with the patten-like leaves, with fallen flower-petals, seed-pods and flower discs. This sudden running dry of the tank had happened soon after the villagers had been made aware of the catastrophe to the temple, and it rendered utterly hopeless any attempt to rescue the building from destruction. When morning dawned the once so graceful structure was already nothing but a heap of mouldering ashes, useless for any religious purpose except to score with their three ashen grey lines, the foreheads of the votaries of Siva. But perhaps thus even in its ashes it better fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended by its founder and architect—to preach a pure religion of monotheism, than when in the heyday of its glory as a Hindoo temple it summoned crowds of enthusiastic worshippers to view the mysterious image of the shrine and the wonders of its pantheistic symbolism. In the Unity of that grey heap of ashes all Diversity, all Dualism were at an end for ever.

One thing perhaps that smote the heart of the Pundit more than anything else was an object lying cold and white upon the ooze of the tank and half concealed by lotus-leaves, and surrounded but untouched by the gasping tench and the writhing eels. It was the body of the unfortunate Lasa which lay there face uppermost, in its Grecian loveliness, untouched as yet by any taint of corruption, in its simple white dress and the gold bordered kerchief of white silk thrown lightly over the bosom. Singularly and mysteriously enough the Ananda ring did not lie beside her, but was placed on the middle finger of her right hand. Had someone put it there? Or had the poison not been fatal, and in her hypnotic state had she caught the ring when Kama touched it with the bamboo and it had apparently fallen to the bottom? However this may be, she was quite dead now and her death was naturally the source of much speculation in the village and the neighbourhood. It was, however, generally attributed to suicide. The sight of the corpse of this poor shamefully abused child more particularly cut the old Pundit to the heart. The futility of all he had done, his gullibility and his pitiable arrogance throughout—all this it was pathetic to look back upon, and of all this the corpse poignantly reminded him with the patient insistence of a silent reproach. The Pundit could bear it no longer, and with a grunt of general dissatisfaction at the illusion which we miscall reality waddled back again to his bungalow and shut himself up in his study. Here he remained inaccessible to everybody.

Meantime, the tragic series of events beginning with the death of the Ranee Ghotra Das and ending with the burning of the temple and the discovery of Lasa's body and the disappearance of Kama, the Ayah Churi Puri and the Nautch-girl Panch Phal Ranee, began to be more and more widely discussed, and it was suggested that the whole matter ought to be made the subject of a legal investigation.

Everything at Poojerabad was in a state of panic and

anarchy. The servants of the Pundit, believing him to have gone mad and horrified at all that had happened, fled the house, taking with them Gudla, his younger son, whom they disposed of to some wandering gipsies, and the old Pundit would most likely have starved to death for he was now quite incapable of doing anything for himself, had not the very few of his devotees who still remained faithful to him visited him and persuaded him to take some sort of nourishment. When they visited him, however, they were surprised to find that in spite of his abject broken and humiliated condition, he abated nothing of his arrogant claims to inspiration and divinity. In fact, in proportion as his adherents fell away from him, in proportion as he himself sank into obscurity and degradation, he more stoutly maintained his claim to be considered as the latest Incarnation of the Deity. Indeed, he now loudly proclaimed not merely that he had become a synnyasi, but that he was already actually immortal and should live for ever on this earth. "Vishnu in his marble impersonation", said the Pundit, "perished that he might free me, from death. Now I live for ever in this world, his earthly living representative for all Kalpas of earthly time. And do you ask me where is Vishnu?—I am Vishnu, you are Vishnu,—it is all Vishnu." When they told him there was a rumour that Kama was the destroyer of the temple and that he had renounced his ancestral creed and become a convert to Saivism, the Pundit wagged his head, tried to look very wise as though he knew all about it, and said with a serene smile of crazy self-confidence:—"What of that? Vishnu is Siva, Siva is Vishnu. My son has fulfilled his destiny. It is all me. I am alpha and omega. It all proceeds for me. I am the origin of all that is." Then pointing to himself he said:—"Bow yourselves, you children of a day, worship, ye frail dust of the earth—this"—and he touched his fat round body—, "this is the navel of the world." It was evident that the Pundit had become insane. The few of his devotees who still remained faithful to him hired an

old woman to come and take charge of him. She was a dry and withered hag with one loose forbidding looking tooth projecting from her upper jaw, and as she stood over him, bore a certain grotesque resemblance to the canopy of cobra's heads that had overshadowed the image of the god, her one shaky fang menacing all intruders, and recalling to mind the single pick-axe-like poison fang of the sculptured serpent of the shrine.

Little by little, when the Pundit's state of mind became more generally known, the idea of a juridical investigation fell into the back-ground. Three of the actors in the tragic series of events having perhaps perished in the fire of the previous days or at any rate having certainly vanished, and the only other person implicated in their suspected villainies being in a state of hopeless idiocy, nothing more was to be done. A juridical enquiry would be a superfluous waste of time, trouble and expense. And so little by little the whole affair which had been a nine days wonder, began to be forgotten in that land of secret murder and murderous intrigue. At last it altogether fell out of the popular memory of a people who possess no historical records, preserve none and desire none.

More and more the Pundit's life dwindled down to an insane repetition of purely automatic gestures. The swoop of dogmatic certainty was carried through just so much of the arc of a circle and no more with a minute precision that was almost pathetic, and the Pundit made a great point of holding up three of the fingers of his right hand in a particular position. It had a mystic significance. When he tired of these trivialities which happened occasionally, the old hag brought him one of those dummies or figure-heads which the Thugs carry with them in breaking into houses, that they may pass it first through the breach they have made in the mud wall of the bungalow they are about to rob, and by this means divert from themselves upon it, the blows of the master of the house who thus exposes himself to the daggers of the house-breakers while he is vainly belabouring a piece of

teak or ebony. This dummy the Pundit was never weary of approaching with a kind of burlesque swagger, and then crushing his hand down upon where the mouth might be supposed to be. As he did so, he turned to the old crone who watched him, with a triumphant smile upon his face which seemed to say: 'You see how capitally I can do it.'

The house of the crazy Pundit and the tank and its surroundings where such sinister events had happened began to have an evil reputation in the neighbourhood. People preferred not to visit it even by day, much less at night. It was supposed to be tenanted by witches and hobgoblins. And certainly it presented a melancholy appearance. Where the gorgeous Mosque-temple had once flung its aery minarets and cloud-like cupolas into the azure sky was only a dusty blasted field. Where the cool waters of the tank, carpeted with a variegated tapestry of lotus-flowers and leaves, once glittered like molten gold in the summer sun or danced in flaky spangles of silver-fire to the light of the full moon, was now only a desolate oblong sluice plastered with a coating of dry scaly ooze, stained here and there with streaky green conferva, also sun-dried, in which stuck the curving skeletons of eels and the bony relics of macerated tench. And under the colonnades where the weaver-birds had nested and the swallows twittered, and the fruit-eating bats had hung head downwards curling their viscid tongues this way and that and looking at the passer-by all the while with their red friendly eyes, now only foul birds of night congregated and jackals and hyenas prowled with eyes of fire. Then a volley of mocking laughter rang echoing among the rows of pillars, there was a hurrying and scurrying of feet a scratching as of claws and paws upon the mud-stained marble pavement, and again all was silence. But whether the sun shone or the moon, whether the night was boisterous or undisturbed, tempestuous or serene. Chandra Dhoondoo Singh sat cross-legged on his silken divan moving his now trembling hand through its con-

tracted are of dogmatic certainty or slapping the wooden dummy with his fat podgy palms, and leering round at the toothless keeper with an inanely foolish simper on his thick yellow lips, forgotten and despised by those who had once hung upon his words as the words of an inspired oracle but still in his own crazy self conceit the centre of the Universe and the Impersonation of his God . . .

CHAPTER XVI AND LAST ET MYSTICA VANNUS IACCHI

And the mystic fan of Iacchus

THE vision faded from the night-heaven and again all was darkness. Only through it all the stars shone with a cold and steelly glitter as they shine above the ice floes in the long winter night of the Arctic regions. Feeling perished, perception turned inward to feed upon the images of things unseen, even thought itself folded its wings in the nothingness of that abysmal space in which light itself was but the torch of death, in which death itself had died for there was nothing of corruption with which to sate its ravening maw. Only the star-light tingled through that sable void, as though it were the soul of dead worlds that sent it the announcement of their deliverance from the horror of existence through illimitable space, sent it who knew whither. And little by little even on the wings of that message of nothingness and the grave, consciousness again stirred, again moved onward. Little by little the motionlessness of the starry host that killed all consciousness with its accumulating intensity was exchanged for a slow paralactic shifting or drifting of the star-particles. The movement increased, until at last all existence was rushing onward in tracks and globes of fire. And in consciousness a strange phenomenon occurred which I must endeavour to bring before

the reader's imagination by a homely illustration. Sometimes, if one is travelling by night or through a long tunnel, if the mind becomes absorbed and then suddenly wakes again to full consciousness, the train appears to have reversed its motion and to be running back again to where it started from. Something of the same kind now occurred. At first the stars seemed to be rushing through the abysmal night of consciousness as though they were electric discharges tingling through the nerve fibres of the brain of space; then, all at once, the stars and constellations appeared to be fixed, motionless, and consciousness to be winging its way through the infinite apparition of the heavens. On and on it sped until it too at last took fire, the windows of the soul were opened and it saw face to face. And yet, in seeing it confessed in its inmost self that what it saw was but external, the mere emblem of something that was inconceivable by mortal minds. What consciousness saw, was this:—

In the infinite distance, far away beyond, and yet within the huge sphere of night in which the innumerable star-spangles clustered and swarmed and fled away on tracts of fire, it saw, staining the intense purple blackness of the night, an immeasurably faint shimmer or nebulosity no bigger than a pin's head. As this faint nebulosity came nearer it grew and grew in size, and at last seemed to overspread a good portion of the heaven, and as it grew it took on a form not indeed human but something that looked like an embryo of an immeasurably gigantic being compounded of the half developed forms of several creatures more or less closely resembling the embryos of highly developed earthly organisms. The compound embryos of stellar space formed of star-matter in numberless different states of diffusion or concreteness, grew in size and clearness of definition as consciousness in its apparent flight through space approached them, and as they grew, exhibited the most astonishing combinations of organic forms, utterly at variance with our ideas of the possible in relation to organic existence, then, as they came still

nearer, they apparently got out of focus, the eye saw their interior structure instead of their visible form in its totality, until at last they blended and formed the immeasurable host of heavenly bodies that seemed to be rushing on tracts of fire through the undivided sphere of the night-heaven, and as they again receded in the distance to give way to other mystic forms of being, they again ran through but in reverse order, all the evolutionary stages of the apparition vanishing at last into the faint nebulosity with which they began. One after the other they appeared in sequences and flights that appeared infinite, exhibiting combinations of organic forms whose strangeness, wonder and horror not the wildest creative power of earthly poet or painter would ever have had the daring to imagine in its most grotesque unearthly moments. The mind reeled, sickened and turned giddy as if it were in some pathological museum of monstrosities, and abnormal growths, and surrounded by vases filled with diseased organs torn out from the bodies to which they once belonged and exposed in all their naked horror to the public gaze. And as these gigantic unearthly embryos of the sky loomed vaster and vaster, rounding at last in perfect clearness to the bodily form that revealed to sight the mystery of their being that was beyond the grasp of thought, consciousness swooned in the agony of its horror, as a human being lost in some horrible wilderness might swoon powerless to resist, when some frightful human monster or compound man and beast seized upon and crushed him in the tabid corruption of its leprous embrace. On and on the illimitable procession streamed. The mind swooned and came to itself, again swooned and again woke to the same unceasing evolution, until at last the prodigious embryo-head of the nebula in Orion with the enormous fan-like spread of its demon wings winnowed the wine-dark night and then unwove itself again in innumerable vortices of light and star-clusters as its rapid approach to the conscious mind and eye brought it out of focus. What other organic forms hid in the bosom of

stellar space might have sprung into perception I know not, but at last, as it faded away, in receding to a feeble blot of blurred light the magnificent constellation of Orion such as we know it, gradually emerged from the sea of jewelled orbs which for a long time obscured its outline by their dazzling splendour, and at the same time the diminutive yellow disc of the sun at first no bigger than a very small wafer became visible with the planets and moons, whirling round it on their variously formed elliptic tracts of light. 'The ring of the lotus drew him to her', the words rang in my ears, their very intensity seemed to be their own fulfilment. They filled me with a yearning for that home of death and misery where he had lived so brief a time and with thoughts of the neglected grave in the church-yard, of the elliptical staircase with its rusty iron stove, all cold and dead, of the strange vision of the seven moons and the bit of rag rough like crape from the apparent blood-stains upon it. And lo! shining like the dew-drop of the child-life, like a tiny casket in the majestic cathedral of nature, like human faith and hope and love, in the abysmal depths of the infinite forms of planetary organic beings and consciousness hung our tiny earth and its dead immortalised moon and drew me to itself. 'The ring on the lotus drew him to her'. The words repeated themselves again and again. And then the two orbs of the earth and the moon grew and grew until at last they seemed to coalesce and cover half the celestial sphere of the night-heaven, and at the same instant a sensation of intense yellowness absorbed my whole existence into itself. It broke like a vast yellow sunset over everything until two thoughts alone dominated my whole consciousness like two beads, one blue and one yellow, suspended through all eternity in mind-space. 'Yellow is the complementary colour of blue'; 'It is the sacred colour of Sakya Muni—of the ever Blessed One'. For one instant I caught a glimpse in memory of that flashing blueness which accompanied my transfer to the planet of the sevenfold unity, and I saw its seven moons

hanging low down in the sky above its wasted prairies. And then, all at once, I found myself in the old elliptical staircase, behind the rusty iron stove, grasping the bit of rag rough like crape from the apparent stains of blood upon it. Again I thought of that lonely grave in the churchyard in the oblong space railed round by iron rails which were now no doubt scaly with rust like the familiar stove I sat beside, I thought of the crib with its stamped iron walls and the wonderworld of the meadow and the child-life that had lived there with the flowers and the butterflies in that primeval paradise.

When sight was lost in seeing,
And men were Gods in Nature's agate being,
And Gods the living Nature life's true life
Enthroned above the rapture and the strife

before the hell of human made divinities and the shadowy idols of the human mind, and the aperies of its social pandemonium had closed me in and blotted out the light for ever. And then I thought of the oblong tank at Poojerabad enclosed in its oblong setting of now ruined colonnades, and thought of the corpse of joy weltering there in the slime and ooze, and of the blasted temple and the crazy Pundit with the old hag, his keeper standing over him menacingly, like a single embodiment of all the three fates of Grecian fable. Then I looked down at the floor and observed that the stove must have been lately lighted, there were the remains of half burnt sticks about. I took a match out of my pocket, struck it and lighted one, opened the grating of the stove and with a little fostering of the nascent flame had soon kindled a fire there. Then I closed the grating, and before very long the flames were rushing and whirling up the chimney as they had done in the shrine of Vishnu when the two halves of the burning curtain rolled apart and the wondrous statue was seen upon its funeral pyre, and the ring revolved, the lotus bloomed and the hammer smote in the magic fingers of the god. And now the stove grew incandescent, aye,

transparent and I saw showers of coloured sparks flashing and eddying in all directions like the jewels that split and shot from the golden pannelled walls of the shrine as the golden plates contracted and expanded with the heat, or like the rain of coloured stars from the shower of rockets before the Nautch-girl appeared in the garden of Mohun Lal. And then I stooped down and peddled with my finger in some ashes that had already fallen from the stove. As I did so, the red hot iron emitted a tremendous ruddy glare, and I found that I was on a hill by the side of a large cannon on a disproportionately large gun-carriage formed of silver or silver gilt. A battle was raging furiously on all sides of me and far away to the west the sun was setting blood red through a blood red band of sky below the dun clouds of the battle field. All at once a shell fell upon the breach of the large field piece and burst, bursting also the barrel of the cannon which flew in all directions. The whole atmosphere kindled in one vast sheet of coruscating flames. Terror, an agony of mind, a feeling of the most heart-breaking misery and perhaps stronger than all these emotions a thrill of the most intense physical delight filled my whole being at the same moment and the fiend whispered in my ear: 'It is a blood sacrifice to Siva'. The words awoke me and I opened my eyes just as a ruddy glow suffused my room in the street near Tottenham Court Road. Again I hurried to the window just in time to see the waiter of the Hotel de la Boule D'or drawing down the second of the red blinds which was doubtless the cause of the phenomenon. Then, I suddenly looked at my hands. There were stains of what appeared to be blood about them. I opened the palm of my right hand. Oh horror, wonder and mystery. On it was rudely smeared what it required no great stretch of the imagination to take for a rough picture of a lotus-flower, and in the centre of the purple petals was a ring of gold stencilled there in golden paint. Then I went back to the arm-chair in which I had been seated. Here were several things of a very common-

place unpoetical kind that partly explained some of the last circumstances in my astonishing vision if it was not, as for my part I still firmly believe, a reality. On the table near the arm-chair was a seltzer water bottle: the cork of which had evidently flown out with a bang, for the silvery colored wire was hanging from the neck of the bottle and the cork was not to be seen anywhere. In my trance or sleep, whichever it was, perhaps feeling thirsty, I must have taken the seltzer water bottle out of the cupboard and in endeavouring to draw the cork, have lost control over it: this would account for the explosion of the shell and the silver-mounted cannon and also for the transparent stove with the coloured sparks flying in all directions: the seltzer water was still 'up' and the bubbles of the carbonic acid sparkled pink and ruddy in the light reflected from the two red windows of the Hotel de la Boule D'or. And when I looked at the bottle, the explanation of the blood stained lotus-flower with the ring on it stencilled in the palm of my hand also flashed across my mind. It was a very simple one. I happened to have a tube of gold paint in the house and when the half dozen seltzer water bottles had been brought to the rooms, having no use for the gold paint I had amused myself by ornamenting several of the mouths of the bottles with it; the red had come off the strip of paper sealed over the cork and fastened down to the sides of the bottle as a guarantee that the contents were genuine. Lastly, on the tray by the side of the bottle I observed the ashes of an ordinary cigarette—not one of cannabis indica—and the remains of the cigarette itself. To make sure that it was only ordinary tobacco, I relighted the stump and finished smoking it. The ashes looked as though they had been pressed and pushed about by some one's finger tip: they explained the hallucination of lighting the rusty iron stove in the elliptical staircase of the old home. And was that all? Not quite. Just as I had finished making these observations, I heard a hubbub of voices in the passage outside my door, and hurried feet on the pavement outside

the window moving apparently in the direction of Catharine Street. Then I heard the voices of my landlord and landlady in the passage exclaiming: "What has happened?" "Oh! a man has been found —" (I couldn't catch the rest of the sentence). "It is in Fitzroy Street." "No! it is somewhere at the top of Rathbone Place." An irresistible impulse drove me forward. I rushed out of my room. Something in my appearance must have astonished the good people of the house for they drew back amazed. Too excited to think of them or of anything I rushed bareheaded out of the front-door (which was open) and into the street where several people, mostly Orientals, were hurrying in the direction of Upper Rathbone Place. Confronting me the red lamp in front of the Hotel de la Boule d'or, with its three yellow discs to represent the golden cannon-ball shone down upon the spare figures and swarthy features of the Orientals. I could not help thinking of the red lamp in the desecrated shrine of Vishnu, and the words came into my mind: 'I shine. I am extinguished and am no more. I am rekindled in other worlds. In other hemispheres.' But the people hurried along and I hurried along with them. We turned into Upper Rathbone Place and then through an archway and down a slum which connects Upper Rathbone Place with Newman Street. Here are some untidy yards with pieces of timber, cart wheels and sheet zinc lying about there in disorder. When you get nearly into Newman Street there is an old-fashioned doorway on the right hand side with some carved woodwork about it now painted to imitate the grain of oak. In its day the house may have been fashionable, even now it is respectable. The proprietor lets rooms for single gentleman. Just before you come to the door there is an angle of the wall which is a favorite place for the disreputable to scribble words and phrases which are not often found even in the most complete dictionaries. What caught my eye on this occasion and made my heart beat was a large figure 7 chalked in white and occupying the greater part of the

plaster to the exclusion of the less innocent hieroglyphies. The door of the house was open. There were several distinguished looking Asiatics talking and whispering together. They were most of them dressed in turbans and flowing Oriental robes. As I entered the door and prepared to ascend the staircase, they stared at me with a look of profound astonishment, then pointed to my forehead whispering to one another and finally bowed respectfully and let me pass through. As I mounted to the second story, I passed an old-fashioned gilded mirror hung against the wall, a candle was standing near it and gave just light enough for me to catch a glimpse of myself in the glass. To my astonishment I perceived across my forehead above the nose, traced in grey ashes the three broad lines proving that I was a votary of the unincarnate god of destruction, the ever blessed Siva! I mounted to the second story of the house. Here was an open door from which proceeded a peculiarly heavy odour as from some sort of burnt herbs. I recognized the smell immediately. It was all that remained of the solitary hashish orgy that this time had proved so fatal. I pushed the half opened door wider and entered the room. There on a couch of yellow silk facing the door lay all that was mortal of the magnificent Hindoo I had seen that morning: Kama Singh had paid the debt of nature to the Great One: already he was beyond the sleep of dreamless spirits. Later I was allowed by the kindness of some of his co-religionists to see the dead Brahmin's papers: they fully identified him as the son of Chundra Dhoondoo Singh and also corroborated the truth of the romantic history which I had become acquainted with in so strange a manner. The body lay much in the attitude of stately repose of the wondrous image of the Vaishnavic shrine which the iconoclast had so ruthlessly destroyed in the hour of his passion and despair. The breast and arms were bare and magnificently moulded. The eyes were wide open—*spalancato*: to use the expressive Italian word—they would never close again in this world. The lower part of

the body was rolled in a grey robe of camel's hair and in general the pose of the body somewhat reminded one of the figures carved upon the ancient Etruscan Sarcophagi, only that instead of the patera it held in its left hand a vessel formed of an enormous tiger's claw mounted in gold—doubtless the gift of the Nautch-girl—Panch Phal Rane—and which had held the mystic herb of life and death. I looked into the staring eyes of the stark dead Brahmin, but read nothing in their cold, hard glitter that repelled one like the star-sheen of the bitter frosty night of arctic regions. The passion and the love and hate that had once flashed out of them so keenly was gone, had perished either to live again in other worlds or states of being or to be swallowed up for all eternity in one long night of everlasting darkness. Then my eyes strayed vaguely about the apartment. It was plainly but not inelegantly furnished in an Oriental style with here and there inlaid sandal wood caskets, Cashmere silver vases and brightly coloured hand-woven curtains and hangings of diaphanous muslins and silk embroideries of graceful Indian flower patterns. About the room hung various beautifully painted fans, and the implements of his trade at which he had been a proficient were also scattered about. On an inlaid mahogany table by the yellow couch lay the unfinished fan he had last been engaged upon, and by it the palette for the paints. I took up the last and shuddered, for the under side of it was smeared with a mass of blood red paint which reproduced in every particular the form of the rudely delineated lotus-flower in the palm of my own hand. Even the ring in the centre was there, stencilled in paint of a dull gold colour: wonderful too was the design upon the unfinished fan. It consisted of seven beautifully executed seven-petalled lotus-flowers, but the seventh petal of the seventh flower was unfinished, it was partly pricked out in seven fine pinholes and then ended abruptly. I put down the fan and turned again to the couch on which lay the dead Hindoo. Firmly traced in ash grey cinders were the

three lines just as doubtless they had been just traced there after the burning of the Mosque-temple, when under the influence of the hashish he had espoused the worship of Siva in the hideous little Saivic shrine in the desolate jungle. Now the sacrifice to Siva was complete. The pitcher was broken at the fountain, the silver cord loosed, the golden bowl broken. The child-world of the golden age of nature and romance, the early fellowship of our great Aryan brotherhood was gone perhaps never to return, but the three ashen grey lines on his and my forehead still forcibly called to mind our common kinship: in the most solemn and the most dreaded and dreadful thing of all that mortality has to undergo: not Aryans alone but all mankind are brothers. A sea of tears filled my breast not for the corpse who lay there so silent on its golden couch, and that was but now a living man: his dread had come to pass, he had crossed the boundary, he knew the worst: or perhaps nothing had happened, no boundary had been crossed, and nothing at all was known. No, not for him that sea of tears filled my breast but for myself and for the vast misery of the teeming millions of living, breathing humanity, who were half-happy only in the possession of illusive hopes, that made the heart of the sceptic sick with pity, as he saw with what a rage of unreason and blind fury they were hugged and cherished, and for those who were perhaps more unhappy still in the aimless night that followed the destruction of those sweet but demoralizing visions. The last shimmer of day-light had already died away in the west. Already the dead was shrouded in nature's winding sheet. I took a last glance at the immortalized Brahmin. The cold glitter of the whites of his eyes seemed still to follow me, seemed still to flash through the gathering gloom as I silently stole from the chamber and left Kama Singh alone in his eternal trance of death.

Om Mani Padma Om, the sunrise breaks,
The dewdrop slips in to the shining sea.

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